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MEREDITH REVISITED AND OTHER ESSAYS

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AND OTHER ESSAYS

BY

J. H. E. CREES, D. LIT.

AUTHOR OF

DIDASCALUS PATIENS

GEORGE MEREDITH

ETC.

LONDON

RICHARD COBDEN-SANDERSON

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PREFACE

The following twelve essays, written at different times in the last eight years, deal with very different writers representative of very different literatures. At first sight there is very little resemblance between Homer and Ibsen, Meredith and Newman, Cicero and Mr. J. D. Beresford. But any method of criticism which is based on really sound foundations must arrive at some general conclusions which it should be possible to apply to writers even as distantly related as those whose works are treated of in these pages. Criticism, to be successful, must not be one-sided. It should view with sympathy, or attempt to view with sympathy, writers of every clime and every age, and though it must be far from sitting on the fence, it must regard with impartial favour the combatants in the secular struggle between the ancients and the moderns, neither contemning the ancients as *passé* or effete because they are ancient, nor refusing moderns the privileges of genius because they were born in the nineteenth (or twentieth !) century. It must not shirk the difficult task of appraising those who have not received the *testamur* of many ages, though it must not make a cult of the *dernier cri*. And, therefore, there may be some justification—one hopes—for including in a single volume so many different names besides the plea which Samuel Butler wittily advances for publishing that of which the world seems in no urgent need, particularly in an age when conditions seem to have conspired for the destruction of the writer unless he be a novelist. Some of the essays herein included were papers originally put together for a private society at Gloucester (the XII). The essay on two plays of Aristophanes ("The Acharnians" and "The Clouds") appeared originally in the *Gloucester Journal* on the occasion of the production by boys of the Crypt School, in 1912 and 1913, of selections from the two plays in the original Greek. The essays were later modified and expanded and now are combined into one longer essay.

As for the essay on the Smoke Nuisance (which has been refused a place in various reviews) it can scarcely claim a place by right in the present volume, but at a time when human beings seem to be fast reducing themselves to the condition of mere smoking machines it is only natural that one to whom the vogue of tobacco is a colossal enigma should set forth his opinion as emphatically as he can.

It is only right to add that Mr. S. M. Ellis, having, as it would seem, settled the differences existing between himself and Mr. W. M. Meredith, has recently (July, 1920) reissued his book on Meredith, and it can be obtained from the publisher, Mr. Grant Richards. What modifications the book has suffered I cannot say, but I gather from a notice in the *Saturday Review* of August 28, that it has been shortened. I was able to see a copy of the original edition and my own essay stands as a criticism of the original work.

J. H. E. CREES.

SCHOOL HOUSE, HEREFORD,
NOVEMBER, 1920.

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MEREDITH REVISITED

A Criticism of Contemporary English Criticism*

1919

" No man was ever written down except by himself." Jeffrey may tell Wordsworth that " this will never do," Lockhart may bid Keats go back to his ointments and ipecacuanha, but Wordsworth and Keats are enthroned with the gods of literature, and their infallible and omniscient censors owe much of their present fame to their fatuous judgments upon rising genius. The truth holds good doubtless of lesser things in literature. An honest piece of work will win whatever recognition it deserves, whether critics are spiteful, fatuous, or merely lazy.

A book becomes a very different thing the longer it is studied. Inevitably it presents a different aspect to the harassed journalist who has, with the aid of the index, to produce an appreciation in half an hour or less, from that which it presents to the sympathetic student whose time has no competing claims upon it, or to the author who has laboured many solitary hours, and burnt many quarts of midnight oil. In some ways therefore a review by the author might be the best appraisement of a book. He is assuredly his best expositor. He is able, or should be able, to set forth the things which he was driving at, he has read his book, perchance with loving interest. At any rate the experiment shall be tried.

The author may indeed be as variable as his most flighty critics. Every man who has toiled his hardest, gone over his pages time after time, filed and polished, trimmed and pruned, knows that feeling of lethargic exhaustion when the unstrung mind turns wearily from the task which has consumed so many hours of ardent enthusiasm and intense thought. The gems which erstwhile seemed so brilliant sparkle no more; gone is the freshness of those happy turns and sudden inspirations. As he gazes at his creation there are good things visible, but they seem embedded in a mass of dead matter. The whole thing is one vast and mis-begotten chaos. The mind is stagnant, dull as ditchwater, the mental energies cease to respond to the stimuli which once were potent. The author is so numbed that he cannot even correct his proofs efficiently.

At other times indeed he may yet win some satisfaction from a perusal of his finished product. Here at least is a condensation of his vaporous fancies, some organisation of a considerable mass of opinions, judgments, moods, some more definite expression of that Protean infinite thing, personality. Here at last in some definite shape has been caught himself. Here is a segment of himself, something that is, and may even abide some little while, (even as long as the British Museum), a clarified record of one human mind. In such a mood he may not be appalled by his own style, or fatigued by his own epigrams. He may even catch himself applauding some apt strokes, or deft phrases, he may even—truly in rare cases—find himself ejaculating like Swift " Good God ! What genius I had when I wrote that ! "

* " George Meredith, a Study of his Works and Personality," by J. H. E. Crees. Blackwell, Oxford, 6/- net.

But the prevailing frame of mind is neither that of sombre pessimism or sanguine enthusiasm, but a settled, cheerful indifference. An honest workman—not a hack—may generally trust with reason that his achievement is not absolutely futile, not absolutely worthless. If he had something to say, he has probably said something of this something. But art is long and life is short, and human powers are weak, and language an instrument of many keys requiring skill consummate for the sounding of them all. The artist, or, if you prefer it, the conscientious craftsman, realises at every completion of a fresh task how imperfectly he has succeeded in getting into words his happiest inspirations, and how rarely the happy inspiration comes. Yet Hope springs eternal. Onward he goes, journeying always towards perfection, never within a million miles of it, on a quest which he will never accomplish, but which satisfies him by the mere activity He prudently counts on audience few if not fit, he is prepared to divert himself if no one else, he knows that in the nature of the case none will give the time and thought to his labours which he has bestowed upon them, first in the rough, then in the hewing of them from the stone, then in the final chiselling Resignedly but resolutely he unloads his slow-gotten gains on a thankless and incurious world.* Great is his handicap. He has to express perfectly and easily what he has laboriously acquired, he has to hit the reader in a minute with the accumulation of a month ; a single phrase may have to represent the generalisation of long hours of reading. Here is condensed on one white page of 300 words, scanned by a careless reader in thirty seconds, taken by an irresponsible reviewer at ten to the minute, the teeming thoughts of long years' experience, the intense literary toil of a whole day. A writer expects but little. He is not perturbed by the light condemnation of a light critic, he is rather surprised than not if any notice his best things, and incense and oblation but discomfit him. A merciless self-scrutiny has strange results. Humility and self-confidence may co-exist It is always easy to be proudly content if one measures oneself by the general average, it is never possible to be anything but humble when aim and achievement are contrasted. Thus the laborious author may combine almost complete depreciation of self with a feeling of not uncertain satisfaction or even arrogant disregard, that extreme of arrogance which is marked by the quiet ignoring of the world He is scarcely amused by not notable anonymity when it tells him his work is not notable, he is equally resigned if he is praised and blamed for the wrong thing, he is as little interested in indiscriminate eulogy as in indiscriminate censure.† He does not ask to be admired, he scarcely heeds it if he is denounced, but what, lodged in a wilderness he craves for, and but rarely gains, is to be understood

Such are the reflections which arise in me as I peruse some forty notices of a recent work on Meredith. I have no particular grievance that demands expression. I had a not unfavourable press. There was, not lavish, yet well-considered praise from those whose verdict I would value most. Some who admired too ardently neither Meredith nor his expositor spread themselves in columns, and adorned their effusions with some of

* There are some who could say with Samuel Butler " Like the greater number, I suppose, of those who write books at all, I write in order that I may have something to read in my old age when I can write no longer. . . . . I have published all my books at my own expense, and paid for them in due course."

† He is however grieved if only one reviewer notices the care he took upon the index !

my best phrases, borrowed without acknowledgment. One kindly critic devoted a leading article to the book, others bestowed the epithet " notable " upon it, (though this must cancel out with others who explicitly declared that it was *not* notable) one or two embarrassed by their lavishness. Many praised me for my enthusiasm. Some, on the other hand, regarding me as a blind and freakish satellite, blamed me for enthusiasm. One vigorous assailant declared the book worthless on this account, though, I must add, he expended three columns on the task under the heading " The Book of the Week." The case in point is of importance only to myself, but the general tendency involved is a matter of more consequence. I propose in the pages next following to examine some of these vagaries, and also to set forth concisely and more clearly, if I can, my estimate of Meredith's greatness and my own aim in writing.

Of this last first. I purposed, not to write a biography of Meredith, not to garner sheaves of anecdotes illuminating or the reverse, certainly not to search for " chatter about Harriet," not to deal with Meredith the man except as he is revealed in his books, but to write as sound and discriminating an appraisement of Meredith's genius as I could. In this task I sought for principles to aid me. I assumed that there *is* a science of criticism.* I assumed that Meredith was a classic, or at least that there was a *prima facie* case for this view. I tried to put him in line with the greatest, ancient or modern. I had recourse to such canons of criticism as I could devise myself, or find expressed in the writings of the great critics. I studied the Meredithian novels in the same detailed manner that one studies an ancient text, though with reference rather to broad principles of treatment, design and construction, philosophy of life, than to linguistic matters, and in all this I took for granted that the training and methods which I had acquired both as a classical student and an historical investigator would be needed in the examination of the works of this modern novelist. I read and re-read him, pencil in hand, I made annotations and abstracts, in my holidays and upon railway journeys when other times did not suffice, and finally, when a considerable mass of material had accumulated, I braced myself for the real task, that of organising this material into a co-ordinated whole. I decided that a *catalogue raisonné* of the novels was useless, and that if I were neither to weary the reader nor to perpetrate a futile summary of the novels, what I left out would be as important as what I inserted. I selected therefore out of the abundance of matter which was now mine only that which seemed to me to illustrate the main lines of Meredith's genius, and the leading doctrines in his philosophy of life. I feel certain now, as I felt certain then, that this was the best method—if it could be carried out successfully—of achieving the end proposed.

This assuredly is not the method of a perfervid partisan. I admired Meredith from my youthful days, not blindly, and certainly in no sense exclusively. If there be any Meredithians, and if a Meredithian is one who lives and has his being in Meredith, who thinks of nothing else, reads nothing else, and cannot stomach Hardy or Thackeray, Milton or Homer, or any other classic whom you please, because these great men are not Meredith, I assuredly am no Meredithian. I burn no incense at his shrine, I have but

* In consequence one critic accuses me of a schoolmasterish tone, and declares that I measure off Meredith with a yard measure.

two of his novels on my bookshelves. I do not even read him at present. Enough of all great writers is a feast. I have had my feast, I want no surfeit, and I have passed on to others. In due time I shall return to Meredith. Meanwhile I am grateful to one who has given me many hours of keen pleasure (incidentally of arduous toil) but I am still free, " nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri." I take my stand on the view that according to the laws of probability great genius may arise as easily in the twentieth century as in the nineteenth or the sixteenth And as Meredith seems to comply with all the requirements of a great man, I rate him as I do.

Emphatic expression of a man's belief does not imply the undiscriminating mind. Great writers *do* occasionally arise, and should be praised according to their merits. Merely to condemn a eulogist as fulsome without condescending to join with him in a long and minute analysis of a writer's work is trenchant, but it is not criticism. Doubtless I admire Meredith highly, but not unboundedly, and not without reserve. Those who read my first chapter and no more,(did any reviewer ever do this ?) might have assumed that the claims made by the author were excessive, but those who had the patience to follow me to the end found surely that I was conscious of the deficiencies of my subject, even though I ranked him highly. I stand outside the circle of the esoteric in moderating my transports, in limiting my survey of the poems to one chapter, in deeming the true poetry of Meredith to be his novels. For this of course the extremist will never forgive me. Leigh Hunt feared to praise Keats as he had desired, lest warm praise and praise from the chieftain of the Cockney School, should merely prejudice a beloved friend. If my praise of Meredith has deterred any from studying him, I am much distressed, but, at a moment when his sun is temporarily behind the clouds, I do not regret that I have laboured as I could to recall the world's attention, and have challenged a verdict. Even if the verdict is unfavourable, there is an appeal.

Eclipse follows apotheosis when a great man dies. " De mortuis nil nisi bonum " often reduces to " de mortuis nil." But after the trough comes the crest of the wave, and in time the fluctuations are less violent. At present however admiration of Meredith is " unfashionable." What are the faults which the present age can find in him ?

First perhaps he limits himself to a too narrow circle. One ingenious penman drew a picture—fanciful but alluring—of " an impartial annalist of a perfected, artificial society reared upon the labour of an inarticulate mass to which it owned neither responsibility nor kinship, whose cold brilliance foretold a corruption to be purged only by its dissolution." The men and women of it are Boccaccio garden-romantics of elegant decadence (Cretans of the Minoan period) magnificently cultured,* " light artificial beings, lovers of a rather glassy irony and analytic laughter, complicated and remote, yet without wisdom "—Olympians, keen advocates of Conscription.† This assuredly will not do. Meredith's characters are not lotus-eaters in a glittering palace. They are, it is true, engrossed in intellectual things which will ever appeal only to a close circle. But neither Beauchamp, giving his life for a waif who falls into Southampton Water, nor Feverel,

* An acquaintance with early Greek history perhaps more definite than the reviewer's emboldens me to suggest that both the decadence and " culture " of these Cretans are somewhat dubious.

† How unreal all this seems. Am I o'erstepping the bounds of measured criticism if I pronounce this " bosh " ?

who in the midst of his passion for Lucy thinks of a mission for the fallen women of London, can be branded as selfish, nor can Dartrey Fenellan or Vernon Whitford, Dr. Shrapnel (" do we live in our bodies ? ay, the Tories, the Liberals ") or Nesta Radnor, and as for Victor Radnor, her father, he is at least a Parliamentary candidate who champions progress. All the nobler characters are, not on the side of the angels, but still better, on the side of humanity. Characters like the Blancoves and Mrs. Lovell, the people of Beckley Court and the Romfrey circle are most liable to denunciation for their remoteness, but plainly they are not held up to admiration therefor. Meredith himself was eagerly, even pathetically, anxious to be sympathetic with the Hedgers and Gammons, with Ipley and Hillford Whether or not it is a paradox, the circle of intellectualism, so difficult of access, is least of all exclusive. Condemn the intellectual if you will, but his domination is least tyrannical. His realm is open to any man of intellect, and after all " barriers are for those who cannot fly."

And then Meredith is condemned for not having written novels. " We might make bold to say that Meredith was not really a novelist at all. He did not write novels ; he used the novel form as a means of containing and differentiating the generalised observation of his own teeming mind." True, Meredith's conception of the novel form was very different from that of his predecessors. At times it almost seems that its sole function is to philosophize upon life, that a novel is as one reviewer put it, a vast series of annotations. It will not be contended here that Meredith has not extensively modified the novel form. " We are learned, almost academic. The Alexandrine age has come."* The conception of the novel has been widened, perhaps even overloaded. But whatever Meredith wrote it was certainly literature and great literature. This is evident from the admissions of his severest critics. In the novel, if in any form of literature, there is room for criticism of life. Meredith, as one who had thought profoundly upon life, had every justification for indulging freely in commentary upon life, providing that he could achieve literature. That he did achieve literature is evident from the fact that most reviewers who have read him have succumbed to his power, and that the Balaams of contemporary criticism subjoin to the curses of their first three-quarters of a column the precious blessing of their final words.

Nothing is more irritating in its way than to read the usual disquisition on Meredith with its seventy per cent. of depreciation, and its thirty per cent of fervid but reluctant eulogy. Meredith's style is " flamingly bad," we tolerate and enjoy it as we tolerate and enjoy the vanity of a man of genius. He is a unique master of dull first chapters,† he tires the reader before he catches his attention, he makes us feel like the first arrivals at a theatre, his people are at cross purposes in a gale, and so forth. But then the censor is swept off his feet. His heroines walk in beauty, not in bustles. His people are full of vigour and lovely dishevelment like dancing nymphs. He was richly recompensed with the poet's wing. Because he has a keener appetite for beauty than any other novelist, therefore his novels have a splendour that even Dickens's lack. When future generations find " Richard Feverel " and " The Egoist " how they will shout ! Another critic has

* " George Meredith " p. 12.

† One feels inclined to say " Then what of Scott ? "

it that Meredith's faults are lapses into turgidity, tedious rhetoric, over-emphasis, incoherencies, rankness of vocabulary, over-strained metaphor, allusion, and aphorism,* glaring eccentricities which are the loose ends and lost stitches of a method which, by a prodigious feat of sheer intellectual ferment, tries to beat mature criticism at its own game. But though egocentric he had a fine, a grand, a huge mind. And so the buzz of criticism proceeds. But it will not do. Criticism is impossible in this solemn quarter sessions manner which after reading a portentous homily dismisses erring genius with a caution. "Solventur risu tabulæ, nam missus abibit." If Meredith's labours fill no small number of excellent judges and even raging Zoiluses with admiration and delight, it is futile to depreciate the accomplishment. Something has been added to the number of Κτήματα ἐς ἀεί, and if this is so Meredith cannot have failed completely in the form which he essayed.

Though it is a great nuisance to oneself and others, cleverness is no sin. Meredith was clever, but cleverness was only one of his numerous qualities. Not all have recognised Meredith's nobility of soul, or marked how his wit and power of phrase, his brilliance of description were all put at the disposal of this quality. In such a mind cleverness takes its place—not the highest. Clever by nature, not by laborious effort, Meredith stands far above the contorted ingenuity and twisted paradoxes of the young 'Varsity man. And he is wise as well as clever.

The severest criterion of eminence in literature is greatness of soul. Does a writer survey Nature on all sides? Is his view complete, is his sympathy far-reaching? Does he conceive literature from a great point of view? Such a method of discriminating will rule out many a charming and ingenious writer from Sir Thomas Browne to Louis Stevenson, Charles Lamb to Walter Pater. It plainly excludes the adroit dealer in paradoxes, the merely sedulous ape, the man who is all brain and no heart, and the six-monthly novelist. Judged by the test of greatness of soul Meredith stands high. He is a man who has communed with the great minds of the past, and is free of their society. Despite his ardour for progress and zeal for the new, he carries on the great traditions of literature, he writes in the great style. There is nothing commonplace about Meredith, there is no scamped workmanship, there is no pornography steaming hot. Meredith is steeped in great literature, and familiarity with great literature has had its usual effect.

This is perhaps granted. Yet, the hostile critic will say, all Meredith's great gifts cannot atone for that crowning fault, obscurity. That Meredith is stiff reading must be admitted. Yet no other style could have expressed his peculiar genius, or his individual ideas.† Like many great writers he creates a universe of his own. This universe we must accept whether we think it capable of improvement or not. A Meredithian novel written in the style of Thackeray or Froude is not conceivable. Those therefore who lament that Meredith was not so simple as Goldsmith, not so pellucid as Newman, not as easily urbane as Matthew Arnold, merely complain that Meredith was Meredith.

* A catalogue longer than that of the seven deadly sins. One calls to mind Cardinal Manning discoursing to Mr. J. E. C. Bodley, and ticking off on his taper fingers at least ten heresies which could be found in Dr. Newman's works. (See later p. 80).

† I note that some reviewers deny this. It were much to be desired that they should furnish us with a few specimens of a suitable style.

With equal reason Carlyle was condemned because he wrote like Thomas Carlyle, and not like Gibbon or Macaulay, as though the peasant of Ecclefechan must wear soft raiment and catch the well-bred drawl of a frequenter of Society drawing rooms, or as though the expositor of Sansculottism *could* write like an Oxford man. It is reasonable to point out that Meredith is not a perfect stylist, that he is by no means a fitting model for a young writer, that at times he glaringly ignores the canons of lucid writing, that ministering to a small audience he naturally surrendered to that tendency towards the abstruse which was already his most serious defect. But those who admonish Meredith for not writing simply upon subtle things, who declare that all this abstruseness is gratuitous, and that he could have written—and ought to have written—just as well in a different style, are merely wasting their time.

Again, Meredith's methods of analysis have been subjected to censure. His exposition of the psychology of certain subtle characters and types has been deemed wire-drawn, failing by reason of its very subtlety and elaboration. I will not say that Meredith never offends. The intellectual is in disfavour with many critics. He belongs, as they tell us, to a small and pampered class, and has had far too much respect lavished on him. He is in actual fact, they say, a helpless, futile person, or if not that, an idle voluptuary, "one of Boccaccio's garden romantics," out of contact with humanity and scarcely influencing it. The indictment is not true. The intellectual influences men much; he is well content to let men pick his brains. He and his class are the leaven which leaveneth the whole mass; he is of a noble, if monastic type. Vernon Whitford is no child; he is the noblest of all the retinue of Patterne Hall, though the most learned save one. Dr. Shrapnel suffers grievously from bags of flour at election times, and his letters are voted odious at Beckley Court. But his visionary plans are now practical politics, his wildest chimeras are stale platitudes. Once again I will urge the plea that Meredith in introducing the intellectual into the novel has added to it a new type. Even Colney Durance deserves a niche somewhere in the temple of life, and we should be grateful that at length a creator has been found who can make a wit speak wittily.

The hardest trial for one who seeks to appraise a modern author is that those who are lukewarm disapprove of enthusiasm, those who are admirers admire such very different things. The latter tell you with triumphant irrefutable logic that your expositions are too full for the uninitiated, but superfluous for the admirer. Like all others they have their pet admirations, and alas for the critic who thinks differently. One who is rapt in Meredith's poetry condemns the "inanity" of any who esteem it less; another is vexed because some favourite work is not fully appreciated by the expositor. The anti-Meredithians are wrathful because a man has praised Meredith, the Meredithians are lukewarm because they are conscious how much better a book they could have produced themselves. Impaled on this remorseless dilemma one is helpless. *Perhaps*, faintly trusting a larger hope, I have interested a few outsiders in Meredith, *perhaps*, as even some critics have prophesied, I have caused a few to take down their Meredith from their bookshelves if only to refute me.* As for the Meredithians proper, they have Moses and the Prophets. I will not hope to evangelise *them*.

* It is strange how many hostile critics have suggested that I shall send many back to Meredith. May it stand me in good stead if and when I meet Meredith in the Elysian Fields.

Yet it is a great enigma that so many who set out to condemn Meredith end by praising him, that like J. D. B.* they spend three columns on a book " worthless by reason of its enthusiasm," written to celebrate the fame of a writer who possesses some of the gravest literary faults imaginable. They pass these solemnly in review, they are so engrossed in the Arch-criminal himself that, mercifully, they forget his latest advocate. The contemporary critic, I fear, is too often tossed about by every wind of unsound doctrine. He is swayed by fashion, and fashion has decreed in its mysterious way that one must not wear Meredith now. And so the critics follow the lead, though they do not know even who has given it.

Meredith then is obscure in expression, over-subtle in the portraiture of character, afraid of the obvious; he has written annotations, not novels. It is a formidable catalogue of faults, reminding us of the heroine of " Love in the Valley."

> " Faults she had once, as she learnt to run and tumbled,
> Faults of feature some see, beauty not complete . . . . . .
> Yet, good gossips, beauty that makes holy
> Earth and air, may have faults from head to feet."

So we may say " Yet, good gossips, genius that makes radiant poem and prose may have faults from head to feet." Did Meredith possess genius, genius in the highest, truest sense, the power to see instantly, to imagine intensely, the impetuous energy which sweeps over and past all difficulties, the nobility of soul, the sympathy with Nature, and the truth to reality which mark the greatest and only the greatest writers? In my opinion he did, despite the barrier of obscurity which he put between himself and his readers. And here one point needs clearer definition. There is a certain quality in a man of genius which is rarely found elsewhere. It is that divine frenzy, the ἐνθουσιασμὸς which the Greeks regarded as the peculiar attribute of the poet. It is that quality described by Shakespeare in his well known lines on the poet's eyes in a fine frenzy rolling. Shakespeare himself is the best exemplar of this quality, but it is found in a smaller degree in other English poets, and it is that impetuous mental energy which Matthew Arnold thought to be the great characteristic of English literature. In this quality Meredith more than any other English writer of modern times resembles Shakespeare, and it was therefore that I spoke of Meredith's mind as Shakespearean. This does not necessarily imply that Meredith was equal to Shakespeare. It implies that there were qualities in Meredith which suggest Shakespeare to the mind, and which place Meredith in certain respects in that class of which Shakespeare is the most shining example, but it implies no more, and my reservation " in some respects " was fully intended. As a matter of plain, obvious fact, Meredith cannot rank as high as Shakespeare. He does not fall to such depths as the writer of the " Two Gentlemen of Verona," or " Titus Andronicus," a " botcher " if there was ever one, but he has nothing like that universality and myriad-mindedness which Shakespeare shows in his greatest plays. Meredith has not that tragic intensity which we find in " King Lear," or that concentrated force which we find in " Macbeth," though in power of philosophic reflection he at times recalls the author of

* J. D. B. forgets what Mr. J. D. Beresford sapiently remarks in " God's Counterpoint," " it is, as every advertiser knows, space rather than adjectives that catches the public attention."

" Hamlet." He has nothing like that free play of unforced humour which the creator of Falstaff has given us. But as an exponent of the Comic Spirit, defined in his own terms, he is scarcely rivalled; he has a quality which the Elizabethans valued highly, the quality of wittiness, and in this can fear comparison not even with Shakespeare himself. In " wit," *esprit*, " manipulation of meanings " as Verrall called it, no author has surpassed Meredith, certainly not Shakespeare, some of whose effusions in this *genre* would be merely booed if they were put on anonymously at a modern music-hall. Shakespeare impresses us almost as much as anything by that wonderful power of assimilation, that quality of being able to pick up anything from anywhere which gave him an extraordinary range of allusion and of metaphor, that marvellous native wit which learnt without schooling, and enabled a youth who left his teachers early and never studied after to achieve such marvellous things as his greatest plays. Meredith had this same assimilative power. No scholar in the academic sense, he strikes us as one of the most learned men of letters that ever lived. He wears his learning " lightly as a flower," and the fertility of his mind is as amazing as that of Shakespeare. It is in this respect that he is Shakespeare's peer. No one could justly say that Shakespeare surpassed Meredith in mere cleverness, in variety of phrase, aptness of allusion, and pointed metaphor. These are not the only qualities requisite for great literature ; the very greatest literature, we will admit, may be austerely indifferent to them. Not a great deal of " wit " is found in Homer, Herodotus, Demosthenes, Wordsworth and others. But wit for what it is worth and what it can do has never found a more marvellous exponent than Meredith. Great literature demands qualities both of mind and soul ; it needs intensity of imagination and vividness of sympathy as much as, or rather more than, astounding mental brilliance. There is this intellectual quality, hard and gemlike in its flame, in all that Meredith wrote, and weighing well my words, and with full emphasis on my reservation, I declared that Meredith possessed *in some respects* the most wonderful mind which had ever been given to literature.

In his essay on Heine, Matthew Arnold tells us that in the great burst of literature which marked the first three decades of the nineteenth century, England had no manifestation of the modern spirit, as the spirit manifested itself in Goethe or in Heine. Englishmen are in the main inaccessible to ideas. It is a text on which Meredith was continually preaching. If it is a weakness in literature to be out of the main current of ideas, it is a weakness of which Meredith is not guilty. If " a passionate, a Titanic effort to flow in the main stream of modern literature " will win remembrance for Byron and for Shelley, it should win abiding fame for Meredith. Meredith dealt with many of the vexed questions of the modern world, with perhaps the greatest and hardest, the Women's Question, with theology, or perhaps rather the philosophy of life that man must frame for himself. Future generations may therefore turn with admiration to one who was a pioneer in ideas as well as a writer of genius.

The comparative method is often as good a way as any of elucidating the characteristics of an author. If, for instance, a classical scholar compares Mr. Bernard Shaw to Euripides, whether you agree or not, by working out the contrast you will learn much more about the merits and demerits of the two writers than you knew before. Knowing this, I compared Meredith with Dickens amongst others, and the comparison to me is interesting. Both men are men of native genius, sprung from the English soil ; men with

quick, active ever-working minds, but yet how different! Admire Dickens as much as you will, but admire him for the right reasons. I am not a Dickensian—nor, as I have said, am I even a Meredithian—but I shall never cease to regard with admiration the inventor of Pickwick. If by some fiat, all English literature save one hundred volumes had to be burnt, Pickwick most certainly we should need to rescue. But those who are unaware that little Nell is a hopeless piece of mawkishness, that Ralph Nickleby is as impossible a villain as any hack of melodrama ever conceived, that the Mr. Carkers, both of them, are absurd, and Paul Dombey unreal, these people—let me put it plainly—cannot distinguish the mock sentimental from genuine pathos, or great literature from the penny novelette. One must take as one's starting point in estimating Dickens's magnificent contribution to English humour, that glorious and unparalleled gallery of grotesques, the dictum that all Dickensian pathos, politics, and sentiment are merely dead matter, and that if all of it were excised from the rest of his works it would be small loss. If Dickens had been given a more regular education, such faults as I have mentioned would have been impossible to him. In this sense he was absolutely untaught and untrained, and without the faintest intention of a sneer, I described him, by the only word which can describe him, as an " untutored " genius. That his contribution to literature would have been more individual and more delightful if he had enjoyed a University education, is an unlikely as that Carlyle would have been a better writer if he had passed through an English Public School and never learnt German. The achievements of Dickens's " untutored genius " are extraordinary. Wise criticism will always recognise both the genius and its untutoredness.

From Dickens to Mr. H. G. Wells or Sir Hall Caine is a considerable descent. My view of Mr. Wells's work as commonplace, though deplored by one reviewer, is shared by many. Mrs. Humphry Ward in her *Recollections* has expressed a similar view, but probably with less emphasis. It is interesting to find J. D. B. coming forward as a champion of Sir Hall, and challenging my awful comparison between the wisdom of the *opera omnia** of that eminent writer and the wisdom of a single paragraph of Meredith. But why this vehemence? Sir Hall has many consolations, and above all the good opinion of his publisher.

All great literature demands of its readers considerable concentration. It taxes the attention, and refuses to surrender its secrets to indolent seekers. To say with J. D. B. that one has not time to read Meredith, is, as a friend of mine and an admirer of J. D. B. remarked, merely fatuous. Boswell's Life of Johnson, Paradise Lost, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire take some reading, but they are not to be removed from the circle of great literature on that account. Browning again requires from his readers, even as much effort as Meredith to be understood, if understood he always can be. But one *can* find time for the great writers. Let those who have any difficulty read fewer newspapers and magazines, and fewer contemporary third-rate novels, and they will discover that they have ample time to luxuriate in Meredith.

* I was accused by J. D. B. of pedantry for using the phrase. But surely J. D. B. even if his schoolboy erudition was limited to Cæsar plus Mr. Giles's " Keys to the Classics," could compass a translation. J. D. B. cannot see the difference between " opera omnia " with the exact suggestion of laboured futility and pompous pretentiousness which I wished to convey and the plain bare phrase " collected works." Bless his simple soul!

Perhaps it would have all seemed a needless controversy to Meredith. In a fine sonnet he tells us that " assured of worthiness we do not dread competitors." One's betters are one's masters.

> " Station is nought, nor footways laurel-strewn
> Nor rivals tightly belted for the race.
> Good speed to them ! My place is here or there."

It is a fine attitude, and a prudent attitude, and a sensible attitude. Blessed are they who expect nothing.

And now for some criticism of my critics. What is wrong with English criticism ? As I look over some forty reviews, leaves of the Sibyl, which as sent me by my cutting agency cram in confusion a small drawer in my desk, I find the oracle of little help. Some critics merely take my book as a peg on which to hang a dissertation or denunciation. They upbraid or discuss Meredith to their hearts' content, but scarcely a word of his expounder and his achievement. Pleasant as it is to find that I have been the occasion of such vigorous mental activity, one still feels that the critic has left his task partly undone. But of those who have given a verdict how conflicting are the sentiments ! Here is one. " A first-rate scholar, Dr. Crees is a true Meredithian, for he writes with a witty dexterity in language and a wide range of metaphor and allusion that reminds us of Meredith himself."* Yet another, after frowning on my " unfashionable " admiration and quoting a eulogistic sentence, declares that such writing is " not praise but abuse of Meredith." The kindly critic of *Education* declared the book " an intellectual spiritual feast, a model of brevity for so great a theme greatly handled," but lest I wax insolent the *Literary World* rebukes me for comments on Meredith's poetry " strangely inane and wide of the mark." A Northern paper condemns me for contrasting Meredith with Dickens and Mr. H. G. Wells, but *Land and Water* is of opinion that I should have considered more closely in what Meredith differs from other writers and thinkers. My vicissitudes continue. The *Quarterly Review* deems the study " worthy of the master to whom it is devoted " but a Glaswegian, while declaring that the author " discourses with eloquence and considerable insight " sees nothing notable in the book. (How one detests that pestilent heresy which assumes that one can be eloquent while talking of nothing ! It is almost as fatuous as the assertion that there is no difference between the " collected works " and the " opera omnia " of Sir Hall Caine).

But it is time for another paragraph. Mr. Tonans—in a study of Meredith that must be his proper appellation—in the course of nearly two columns declared that the book " should do much to crystallise opinion upon Meredith," seeing that the judgment is " the considered opinion of a man who writes with ability and critical insight," the *Guardian* even deems it " one of the best books of literary criticism published since the declaration of war," but the *Scotsman* (Oh ! those unspeakable Scots !) finds nothing new. As I have not been able to prove that Meredith wrote the letters of Junius or

* *The Saturday Review.* As a rule I have not given the name of the journal cited, deliberately. Reviewers have short memories, and there is no need to prejudice them unduly against the present book.

perpetrated the Whitechapel murders, this is possibly true. No wonder that I put away my leaves and murmur

" inconsulti abeunt sedemque odere Sibyllæ."*

I hold that the motto of the *Edinburgh* is entirely true, " judex damnatur cum nocens absolvitur." It is the business of the critic to condemn bad work as severely as he pleases, and if he will only condemn the half-baked novels written for journeys in the train, the ungrammatical and unscannable verses, the books that are no books, which form nine-tenths of the year's literary output, I am well content, like the slave in the "Frogs" of Aristophanes, to take my full share of any drubbings that are going. " Nothing extenuate and set down nought in malice." But modern critics with an eye on the advertisement columns are usually as vague and unrevealing as a schoolboy's terminal report. And, as I have shown, they are contradictory. Most reviewers, one feels, might as easily as not have taken the opposite view It is not for their ferocity but for their uncertainty or timorousness that one would condemn them most. The reviewer who is complimentary but superficial is perhaps the most embarrassing. But he is ill paid and ill equipped, and it is a safe maxim, " Don't shoot the pianist, he is doing his best."

Not of course that no critics have put their hand upon weak spots. I admit for instance that I am not steeped in the Russian Novelists, partly because my own experience of the Russian novel has not chimed with the lavish eulogies of the present fashion. Had I devoted more time to Dostoeffsky, Tolstoy, and Turgenieff, my comparison might have been fuller. Again, it is distressing as I read over my first page to find the style still the same as in my essay of thirteen years ago on Claudian, the same but more prolific in epigram, in which style as the *New Witness* informs us " it is impossible to tell the truth." I cannot help my epigrams, they intrude unbidden. I plead guilty—with a certain amount of pride—to being a schoolmaster, and I do not deny that I have mixed with scholars (" pedants ") and lived mainly with the great writers of the past. I do not consciously love Meredith for his obscurity, and as for the Meredithian secret, so far from making it into a cult, I have tried to explain Meredith to all who care to listen. I admit to an *anima naturaliter Meredithiana*, but that is no disqualification in a critic of Meredith. Of two faults I have been accused to which I cannot plead guilty. I do not admit that I have been prolix. Rather would I claim that I have compressed as much into two hundred and eighty pages as most could,† and that what repetition occurs is merely that repetition which is needed in any book or discourse to drive points home. Nor can I admit an unbalanced enthusiasm. In my previous literary and controversial activities I have been nothing if not critical, and if I am an admirer of Meredith it is not because I have a servile mind. I will boldly aver that my readers though they may not share my admiration—there is no accounting for tastes—are quite in a position to realise the weakness of Meredith as well as his strength Truly, after this Meredithian conversazione, I am left in a whirl. I ought perhaps to take a vote. Some dozen definitely damn me (one on hearsay for " indiscreet ecstasy," a naval man‡), a few more

* They depart without guidance and they hate the dwelling of the Sibyl.

† One critic admits that I cover a good deal of ground.

‡ Misled, I think by J. D. B.

merely damn Meredith. Three declare the book notable, and three declare it not notable, one declares me prolix, another finds that I cover a great deal of ground, five or six declare with sidelong emphasis that the master critic of Meredith is still to be born. But before the returning officer declares the poll he must institute a recount. There have been many spoilt papers, and, as usual, some cases of personation; Matthew Arnold and Olympian Jove have both, in appearance, voted several times, not to speak of Zoilus. May the best cause win.

Yet perhaps if the professional expounder fail me, I must myself approach the searching question "What manner of book is my "George Meredith"? I cannot tell. I have no guidance from the seats of Aristarchus, and immediately it is finished my own work repels me. But in this queer world many books of far less pith have swelled the coffers of the publisher (sometimes even of the author) and perhaps, though I am caviare to the general, I may have pleased a few. The book has one thing in its favour. It was written by an amateur for pleasure, and its failure will not take me to the workhouse or to Waterloo Bridge. What *does* disappoint me is that in dealing with a man like Meredith, many connoisseurs of fine perception seem at the mercy of chance or prejudice. In slightly altered circumstances the critic might have been as admiring as he is unsympathetic or even blind, headstrong and perverse. Diverting as it is to count ayes and noes, to find equal emphasis and equal conviction in opposing camps, the case is serious too. "Quis custodiet custodes?" If any do guard and cherish our English literature they certainly must needs be different from the "irresponsible, indolent reviewers" whose judgments I have set forth. Mr. Benson, it is true, has declared that "criticism is ultimately based upon individual opinion, and opinion shifts its channels. There is no scientific standard instantly applicable in the case of contemporary work." But there may be definite general principles not too empirical, which should enable a man to give a verdict not too faulty. If there are not such principles—and Matthew Arnold would have vehemently asserted that there are—criticism is merely a critic's fad, and fads are worse than prejudices.

And so I am left again to analyse my book and self. As I take my lonely walks abroad, the writer of "a notable book" scowls arrogantly on his undistinguished (and undistinguishable) *alter ego*, the "vivacious exponent of the Meredithian philosophy" condemns that style in which one cannot tell the truth (*New Witness*), and the "quaint enthusiast" is rather dubious of his twin self's epigrams. How shall we resolve the mystery? "Adieu," or rather "au revoir, messieurs les critiques."

SKELETONS IN CUPBOARDS*

OR

GEORGE MEREDITH AND S. M. ELLIS

1919

No man is a hero to his second cousin. The bump of reverence is not developed in such distant kinsmen. They have perhaps known the great man as a boy, when he was as quarrelsome and greedy as most boys, they have been involved later in family feuds and bickerings, they have freely criticised and been criticised. They are ready to exploit his greatness, and to demonstrate how much the great man owed to his kin, but they love him on " this side of idolatry."

When a new book on Meredith by a kinsman was announced in 1918, a book which was declared to contain much new information on Meredith's life and history, those who admired Meredith were keenly expectant. The enterprising publisher sustained the interest by his weekly bulletins, and finally after various delays the book appeared in January, 1919. It was well illustrated, and according to figures given by counsel in the course of legal proceedings, contained 13,788 lines. Of these lines, however, 38½ per cent. were quotation, 688 lines of poetry, 1000 lines of prose, and 3,547 lines from letters† (5,250 lines in all). Mr. William M. Meredith, the son of George Meredith, considered that the Meredith copyrights were infringed and obtained an injunction to restrain the publishers from further printing and publishing " George Meredith ; His Life and Friends in Relation to his Work." At the end of July, as a grand finale, Mr. Ellis and Mr. Grant Richards, the publisher, declared the book withdrawn from circulation, and expressed their regret for the unauthorised use of copyright material. Mr. Ellis also regretted implications in the book concerning George Meredith's life which are not in accordance with the facts.

Such is the undignified end of a book whose birth was announced with such a flourish of trumpets. But " George Meredith " was widely reviewed, and Mr Ellis's judgments on Meredith were freely discussed. It is possible to examine them here without infringing the Meredith copyrights, and it seems desirable to do so.

The book was limited in its scope. It contained, as the author himself avowed, " no profundities of criticism," it would cause " no flutterings of dovecotes of Meredithian culturists, etc.—it was " simply the individual views of one unimportant person." The author aimed merely at giving fuller information as to the family history of Meredith and at furnishing keys to the novels, above all to " Evan Harrington," which had long been deemed to a large extent biographical. Unlike another book on Meredith published contemporaneously‡ the study scarcely dealt with Meredith as a novelist, a technician, or a philosopher, or even as a stylist. We are told indeed that the pendulum has swung to the other extreme. " Subtleties are now discovered which Meredith never intended."

* The reader is reminded, see Preface, that Mr. Ellis's book has been re-issued by the Publisher in a somewhat reduced form, and is, of course, procurable in the ordinary way. The review was written before the matter had been settled between Mr. Ellis and Mr. Meredith.

† See the *Daily Telegraph*, April 12th, 1919. The actual total of lines quoted appears to be 5235.

‡ " George Meredith ; a study of his personality " by J. H. E. Crees, Blackwell, 1918.

Clara Middleton—this is flat blasphemy— is not a great character compared with Rosamund Culling, Cecilia Halkett, and others. She is a " selfish, wayward girl, an undutiful and disobedient daughter, deceitful and prevaricating," a judgment upon which we shall leave all readers of "The Egoist" to give their verdict. The Meredithian style is damned by secondhand* and also in Mr. Ellis's most elaborate sentence. " Its cold glittering artificiality and philosophical preciosity, sheer cleverness, wealth of criticism, riot of outrageous simile, concatenation of antithesis and antiperistasis† make it unique, a towering Alpine peak in literature, crested with eternal gleaming snows." But apart from a few arbitrary and capricious judgments, and the excellent photographs, the book is mainly " chatter about Harriet."

What is now ascertained fact as the result of the work of Mr. Ellis and others ?

Meredith was born at Portsmouth, in 1828. His grandfather Melchisidec Meredith, was baptised at Portsea Church in June, 1763, and married Anne Mitchell, a handsome woman we are told. Seven children were born to them at 73 High Street, Portsmouth. The Great Mel., like the great Mel. in " Evan Harrington," did not attend to his business as he should have done, but he became churchwarden at St. Thomas's, was an officer in the Yeomanry, and hunted. Of his children, Louisa married in 1811 (aged 18), W. H. Read, who later, in 1832, became Consul-General of the Azores and held a high position in Portuguese Court circles. Her daughter‡ married the Marquis de Thomar, who became a Minister of State, and in 1870 was Ambassador to the Vatican. (His brother's name was Silva, which reminds us again of " Evan Harrington.") Harriet, another daughter of the great Mel., married in 1811, John Hellyer, a brewer of whom little is known. Another daughter, Catherine Matilda, married in 1819, Samuel Burdon Ellis, Lieutenant in the Marines, who had a distinguished career and became a General and a K.C.B. A son of his, George Ellis, the original of Crossjay Patterne, went into the Navy at fifteen, and was killed at Bull Run in 1861. Augustus Urmston Meredith (1797-1876) the son of Melchisidec, and the father of George Meredith, " a muddler and a fool," as his son described him, was, like Evan Harrington, at Lisbon when Melchisidec died in 1814, heavily involved. Mrs. Meredith then looked after the business but later the supervision of it fell to Augustus. Augustus married Jane MacNamara, the daughter of a publican who kept the " Vine." Jane MacNamara was *not* pure Irish as Meredith liked to believe. She died in 1833. In 1841, Augustus Meredith married his housekeeper, sold his business and went to London.§ George Meredith, a youth of twelve summers who was already conscious of his superiority and read character consummately, was no doubt neglected. He was however sent to a good school, and in 1842 was transferred to the well-known Moravian seminary at Neuwied. In 1846, at the age of seventeen, he was articled to a solicitor

* J. M. Robertson (quoted) " perpetual grimace of expression, twisting the face of speeches into every shape but those of beauty and repose, is in no sense admirable."

† Surely a " precious " word.

‡ From this aunt Meredith learnt manners, he declared.

§ He later emigrated to Cape Town, where he founded a business, and was shocked to find his family history revealed and burlesqued when " Evan Harrington " appeared. Things did not go altogether well, and in 1863 he returned to England. His son saw him occasionally but there was no love lost.

named Charnock, but he soon addicted himself to literature. His mother had left him a little property, and he did not start as writer with only a guinea in hand, nor did he live on cold porridge as legend had it. He married, in 1849, the daughter of Matthew Love Peacock, after having been refused six times, and the story of their life may be traced in the sonnets on *Modern Love*. His wife left him, and when she was dying Meredith refused to see her. The horror of illness and the circumstances of death which is generally found in the imaginative temperament, is the only excuse, Mr. Ellis tells us, for Meredith's harshness, and no tombstone was put up over the unhappy woman's grave. In his second marriage, with Miss Vulliamy, Meredith found great happiness.* His fondness for excessive exercise gave rise to spinal trouble which left him an invalid for the last part of his life. He became very deaf, but did not speak in the low remote tone usual in deaf people.† He had a perversely exaggerated view of the critics ;‡ like the hustings orator, he was, he averred, " accustomed to the dead cat and the brickbat." As a matter of fact Mr. Ellis tells us he found recognition from the best critics early, and from 1860 he was comfortably off. He was unattractive in his family relationships. He was almost as great an epicure as Adrian Harley (Maurice Fitz Gerald) he wrote articles on the *Tory* side for the *Ipswich Journal*, and he was a publisher's reader without flair.§ Such are the main counts in Mr. Ellis's indictment.

Mr. Ellis has also been at pains to connect various of the novels with Meredith's own life. " Evan Harrington " is an extravaganza (parts of which are very poor!) founded on the shop at 73 High Street, Portsmouth. The shopkeepers are there almost to the life, Mr. Kiln, landlord of the Wellington, Mr. Banes, a pork butcher, Mr. Grossly (Grossmith), a confectioner, Mrs. Fiske, the wife of a jeweller, and Mr. Goren (Galt), a rival tailor. What Mr. Ellis objects to is the distortion of the character of Strike the Marine and of his lovely wife. Mrs. Ellis, for Mrs Strike is of course she, never contemplated an elopement. After a simple and well spent life she died in 1847 aged 52. Strike " was, it is true, engaged not always successfully in business speculations, and it is possible that he had advised his nephew badly in his railway investments," hence this travesty.‖ This is however merely Mr. Ellis's hypothesis. The history of Evan Harrington is presented to us as fiction not as family history, and the world at large is not concerned with the undoubted virtues of General Ellis. It is unfortunate in any case that Mr. Ellis never seems to have overcome his prejudice against Meredith.

* But this union led to an estrangement between him and his little son Arthur. Arthur Meredith, a boy of rare gifts and promise, died early. As usual, Mr. Ellis puts the blame on George Meredith for the estrangement, though the boy seems to have been of a morose, brooding temperament.

† Most people's experience of the deaf will be different from that of Mr Ellis.

‡ Yet when an eminent review like " the Spectator " could speak as follows, Meredith had certainly some grievance. " Mr. Meredith is a clever man without literary genius, taste, or judgment . . . . He brings no original imaginative power to his task. He sometimes treats serious themes with a flippant levity that is exceedingly vulgar and unpleasant." May 24th, 1862.

§ He certainly did reject Butler's "Erewhon." From the trade point of view he was probably right, for Butler tells us cheerfully that all his works were published at his own expense and brought in nothing for years.

‖ Mr. Ellis accuses Meredith of " a petty and long-brooded animus against his relatives."

Mr Ellis supplies a great number of other identifications which are often attractive and convincing though based most frequently on Mr. Ellis's mere *ipse dixit*. Meredith's first school is described in "Harry Richmond," his visits to Seaford gave rise to "The House on the Beach,"* and his landlady Mrs. Ockenden becomes Mrs. Crickledon, and also sat for Mrs. Berry. Lucy and Richard met at Shepperton Lock, and many scenes in the novels can be localised at Copsham where Meredith lived and worked for some time. The mound where Æmilia is found singing is the mound at Copsham which was a favourite resort of gipsies, beggars, and tinkers (compare "Juggling Jerry.") Sir Purcell Barrett dies near Blackpool at Copsham, and a night of frost in May which is mentioned in "Sandra Belloni" (with scenery resembling that of the Mound region), is celebrated thirty years later in a fine poem. Blackburn Tuckham is obviously Sir William Hardman, Lady Jocelyn (and Lady Dunstane too) are obviously Lady Duff Gordon, and her daughter Janet Ross was the model both for the divine Rose Jocelyn and for Janet Ilchester. What is most interesting is that the Duff Gordons were aware of the delineation, and criticised and approved their characters while they were in creation. Tracy Runningbrook certainly suggests Swinburne, Fairly Park is Beaulieu and Warbeck Bursledon. Shrapnel is partly Meredith himself; Beauchamp is, as all knew, founded on Admiral Maxse, and Leslie Stephen suggested Vernon Whitford. Patterne the marine was no doubt General Ellis, and in this case Meredith freely acknowledges "my grandfather's bravery." Mr. Ellis, not to be outdone in generosity, admits that Crossjay, being a member of a large family, was questionless frequently hungry. And if we should continue Mr. Ellis's series of identifications we should find amongst other things more or less interesting that Lord Ormont was Charles Mordaunt, third Earl of Peterboro' (and had too something of Lord Cardigan in his composition), that Gower Woodseer faintly resembled R. L. Stevenson, that Rockney the great journalist was Frederick Greenwood of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and Kirby, the old Buccaneer, was taken from Trelawny, Byron's friend.

Some people are much more interested in persons than in achievements, they fasten upon the superficialities or trappings of greatness, they prefer anecdotes to intimacy. To such people Mr. Ellis will seem to have written "an A 1 book about a C 3 god" to have "woven together a great deal of material about Meredith which is not to be obtained elsewhere in book form"† or even to have compiled "a record essential to those who would understand Meredith and his writings." The book is, so far as the author has linked up literary matter with the facts of Meredith's life, "valuable and illuminating," of all books on Meredith "probably the most significant." Other critics have spoken disparagingly of "small talk about Meredith."‡ "The limitations which Mr. Ellis has imposed upon himself are such that his work can neither be accepted as the final biography of Meredith, nor again as a study possessing the qualities of a work of art .... His critical remarks are sparing, and his narrative is often shrunk to 'biographical links,' connecting quotations from all sorts of sources, including a certain number of letters here published

* A great flood occurred in 1876 at Seaford, similar to that in the story.

† As a matter of fact, not a few of the facts mentioned in Mr. Ellis' book are to be found in Mr J. A. Hammerton's "Meredith in Anecdote and Literature."

‡ Similar criticisms have been passed upon the still more recent book of reminiscences of Lady Butcher, who is a great admirer of Meredith.

for the first time. A book is thus produced which may be said to be the prelude or pre-natal state of a book rather than a book in being."* It shows us the wrong side of the carpet. However, as the same critic wittily remarks, we do not often feel ourselves in the position of listeners at a keyhole. " If Meredith were to open the door he would find us for the most part devoutly examining the boots and umbrellas in the hall." Here are two very different points of view clearly expressed.

But what of the inner circle of admirers and friends ? It is reported that one feminine Meredithian declared that she could never now feel the same. This lady must have cherished an undiscriminating enthusiasm for an idol of her own invention. Meredith was human and he had human frailties and foibles. The testimony of all who knew Meredith well is that he was indeed a great man, a striking personality, a noble soul. If there were any who imagined that Meredith had no faults, that he sat always upon Olympus, they are well disillusioned, and Meredith is well quit of their admiration. Other men, even if they have not lived in harmony with their wives or have quarrelled with their sons, have still retained the world's respect. And in any case, there are few skeletons in Meredith's cupboard. " Perhaps we never shall find the factor which enabled Meredith to unite Nobility of poetry and philosophy with unworthiness of action, which enabled him to be a fine and attractive personality on one side of his nature and a little mean and cruel on the other." We certainly never shall reduce the innumerable variations of mankind to a calculus, and we must be content with the complexity and inconsistency of poor human nature.

On much of Mr. Ellis's indictment two different verdicts are possible. Even accepting the severer of the two judgments, how little is Meredith's position as a great writer impaired ! What does it matter to us how unsavoury Shakespeare's private life may have been, or that Milton was harsh and inconsiderate to his daughters, or that Carlyle had a bitter tongue, or that Dickens was separated from his wife ? When a man sits down to create great literature, it is the nobler part of him which is in action. His meaner agents fall into the background ; it is his finer, loftier, more real, self which alone for the time exists. There is no disclosure of Mr. Ellis which need in any way diminish a sane, well-balanced regard and admiration either for Meredith the writer or for Meredith the man.

So much for the side-lights on Meredith's character. As to the information about the novels, two views are possible. It is useful to have one's view confirmed that all great novels are in some sense autobiographical. When we know something more of the details of a writer's life, we may, conceivably, understand still better the things he wrote. But at any rate we are struck by the immeasurable difference between the raw material and the finished product, and we are sometimes dismayed to find the poet's airy nothings labelled with their local habitation and a name. It is for this reason that illustrations of novels, still more of poems, are far more often a hindrance than a help. The Woods of Westermain are far more mysterious and awe-inspiring than Deerleap Woods (near Abinger and Norbury Park) Dartrey Fenellan, that splendid English type,

* *The Times*, February 13th, 1919. So the *Westminster Gazette* of February 8th. " As a result his book is merely a stage towards the understanding of Meredith, whether personally or artistically considered . . . . The author knowing too much to be a whole-hearted adorer, is still too timid to be a realistic iconoclast."

is a far more imposing and magnificent figure as Dartrey Fenellan than as Colonel Burnaby, that gallant soldier whose effigy with fez and side whiskers adorned the walls of so many Victorian households in the eighties, and even Rose Jocelyn loses her ideal charm when we know that she was the talented and charming daughter of a talented and charming mother who smoked strong cigars, and that she wrote in later life not very striking memoirs about " My Poet " and others.* It was the eye of genius which saw the diviner characteristics in these human types, and it is genius, and genius alone, which created these immortal presentments.

And there is another conclusion which Mr. Ellis's Book suggests. Meredith was probably more aware of his faults than he seems. There is perhaps in every man a duality, a higher self and a lower. The higher self may be overcome by or submerged in the lower at times, but it abides, one would hope, and comes safely through many hurricanes and tempests. In Evan Harrington, Meredith was satirising the whole world; but consciously or unconsciously he was satirising also himself and everyone who at any time has been uneasily conscious of social deficiencies, ashamed of his forbears, ashamed of his own position, cowering before convention, a worshipper of gilt gingerbread. If he wished to know how a youth, callow, unformed, unhardened, would comport himself amid the stresses and temptations of life he looked within himself. In older days men of piety secretly lamented their shortcomings, secretly scourged themselves, and wore hair shirts. To-day they may, if men of letters, make reparation in a better way. All sinners have an impulse to confess their sins. The man of letters may confess his, symbolically, to mankind in general, and the whole world is his confessional box. His readers are amused or thrilled and under the mask of some hero of his creation they give absolution to the creator of the hero. What if Meredith had something of the snob in him ? He thrashed it out of himself, and like his own Evan, he emerged from the purgation of his own satire a changed and better man.

As one who studiously avoided gossip in his own study of Meredith, I will admit that Mr. Ellis's book of anecdotes affords food for thought. It does not contribute greatly to our knowledge of the real Meredith, it is in no sense an authoritative exposition of the verdict of considered criticism. A writer who thinks Clara Middleton a bad undutiful girl,† and Willoughby Patterne a tragical figure, who deems the "Tragic Comedians" too short and finds "One of Our Conquerors" difficult to read, is far from the centre of Meredith. But those of us who are English will be relieved to find that Meredith was less Celt than he thought‡ and the grammarians who will some day doubtless expound the novels and poems will have some advantage, thanks to Mr. Ellis, over Homeric commentators. Despite the search of generation after generation Homer's grandmother is still unknown, but Meredith's kept a Portsmouth public-house, and the topography of Meredith's works is now clearer. Yet one still wonders why Mr. Ellis wrote his book. Was he intimate

* See " The Fourth Generation " by Janet D. Ross. How thankful one is that Rosalind and Miranda never wrote their Reminiscences.

† And yet she was kind to Crossjay, uncle Crossjay, shall we say ?

‡ It will take several generations at least to carry back the Meredith family—on either side—either to the land of the Cymry or Hibernia. Meredith is mainly good Hampshire.

with Meredith? We have not even Mr. Ellis's claim for it, and as far as the book demonstrates the two men may never have met. Was it that he had some grudge against his kinsman? He seems to be sniping at Meredith from behind cover, he temporises, willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike.

"Habent sua fata libelli." The fate of Mr. Ellis has been to appear as the chief actor in a fiasco, and that book which was to set forth in final and authoritative fashion the facts of Meredith's life has disappeared with an apology for infringement of copyright and incorrect implications into the limbo which is reserved for those books which never come to birth and with them for books which never live after birth.* *Requiescat!*

* See note, p. 16.

THE ODYSSEY

1918

" Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen ;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne ;
Yet never did I breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold :
—Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken ;
Or like stout Cortez—when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific, and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien."

KEATS (On Homer).

" rursus quid virtus et quid sapientia possit
utile proposuit nobis exemplar Ulixen."

HORACE (On Homer).

Great writers suffer as much from the idolater as from the iconoclast, from comfortable neglect as from insolent disesteem. They are first flouted and not read, and then canonised and not read—save perhaps by schoolboys, ignorant of their blissful fortune, who loathe their begrimed Virgil or their dog-eared Shakespeare, or " that hateful Tennyson." Their niche in the temple of fame is usually a page or two in a textbook of literary history. And, as an able critic* has said, great books, like certain insects, have a curious way of shamming dead when dangerous persons are abroad. One of criticism's chief functions, therefore, is to restore and to recall to life the great writers, to interpret them anew, to infect others with the critic's own enthusiasm, to rescue masterpieces from the gnawing bookworm and the dusty pre-eminence of library shelves. Critics must see the immortal in the " dead " language, the mortal in what came hot from the press yesterday. Engrossed in the tendencies of the moment, lured by the " last cry " of the present day, intrigued by the ebullitions of the futurist, we take the verdict of past criticism for granted. We shrink from the truth which is so venerable that it is a platitude, we vaguely feel that the past has nothing new to say to us, that its writers give us nothing new to read. We are of course wrong. A great work of literature has perennial charm, abiding truth, and the complete critic is he who can be thrilled by Homer as though he flourished yesterday, and can appraise Rupert Brooke or Herbert Trench as though they lived two thousand years ago. Let us venture on a voyage of discovery. We shall not have the awesome thrill of the astronomer when some new planet swims into his ken, but we shall experience, if fortune be ours, the scarce less delight of recapturing something of the charm of literature's most perfect achievement.

* Mr. T. R. Glover " From Pericles to Philip."

THE ODYSSEY

Homer is too big to be a cult. He needs not votaries that assemble at due seasons to celebrate their hidden rites, mysteries doubly delightful in that the vulgar understand them not. Even the Philistine might listen, not too long, with interest to the recital of the banquets of Homeric heroes, or the description of that wondrous bedstead which Odysseus, first of practical men, did build, and a sojourner at Lord Rowton's lodging-house might hear with a chuckle how Odyssey, on bivouac in a colder latitude than Thames Embankment, gained a comrade's mantle by a stratagem. Homer—let us for the nonce venture on the vast assumption which that single word implies—Homer is a very Proteus, and eludes us in all his different aspects. He is a mine of folk-lore, a treasury of archæology, an authority for historians, a text for students of primitive custom, for contending cities an oracle, for young Greeks a Bible, for epic poetasters a quarry inexhaustible. We shall regard him here as literature, avoiding all but the very fringe of that Higher Criticism which has dissected him into a score of rhapsodes, and analysed him into three or four strata. Age cannot wither or custom stale his infinite variety. We cannot weary of that freshness as of the morning dew, that romantic vision of the world's earlier ages revealed in the greatest of the Classics, that grand simplicity, that unbroken sympathy and harmony with Nature. As for him who contemns Homer and spurns the epic—" vetabo sub isdem sit trabibus fragilemque mecum solvat phaselon,"—let him not launch on my frail barque or sit 'neath the same beams as I.

In the dawn of Western literature the Iliad and the Odyssey shine out with startling suddenness. We cannot doubt but that a series of sacred bards born ere the age of Agamemnon must have been needed for the begetting of a Homer. The Iliad—the elder brother of the Odyssey—has won a higher eminence in the suffrages of the world at large. The splendour of its setting, the brilliance of its description, the power and pathos of its ending, " the tale of Troy divine," has overshadowed the subtler charm, and the less obvious force of the tale of the wanderings of much travelled Odysseus. The Iliad has a hero, hard and wilful as youth will be, yet with a glorious halo investing his brief life, strangely beautiful in the foreshadowing of an early death. " Quis strepitus circa comitum ! quantum instar in ipso est ! sed nox atra caput tristi circumvolat umbra." Youth will be served. Odysseus, middle-aged, shrewd, prudent, a skilful manager, a wily politician, cannot hope to compete against his younger rival. Moreover in the Iliad we seem to be always looking down from an Olympian height upon a struggle of the mightiest in the world, a contest into which the gods themselves deign to enter. We are held in suspense at the alternation of success and failure, enthralled by a brilliant picture of humanity, thrilled by the sight of greatness, strength, and beauty, now triumphing, now hurled into the dust. " Upon Death's purple altar now see where the victor-victim bleeds." And at length there comes the wondrous climax when Achilles, overwhelmed by the fate of his beloved Patroclos, at last makes his entrance on the stage of battle and slays Hector, the glory and the bulwark of the Trojans, and then that most pathetic of all scenes in which Priam endures what none had endured before, to kiss the hand of the man who had slain his son, the prelude to that colossal tragedy of the ruin of Troy which worked so much upon the imagination of Euripides, the " realist."*

* In " The Trojan Women " and " Hecuba," above all.

Yes! if we wish to indulge in the bad habit of placing in order works of differing charm and different design, we may say with Longinus that in the Odyssey there is not the same profusion of accumulated passions, nor the supple and oratorical style packed with images drawn from real life. From this point of view the Odyssey is "a sinking sun whose grandeur remains without its intensity." But literature need not always be tense moments. Those who laud the Iliad at the expense of the Odyssey have missed one of the greatest things in literature. The subdued grandeur, the homelier tale, the equal or rather the greater art, the more level fulness of achievement have a charm and spell which it is difficult to resist. We have here literature at its best and freshest, with none of the faults of modern days to be sloughed off, literature stripped of its garish ornament, its false sentiment, its exaggeration, its rant, or its sophistication. We have things limned as they are, viewed through the limpid air of Ionia, not through the distorting hazes of Romance, fresh, vivid, and infinitely touching, ever obedient to the precious maxim μηδὲν ἄγαν, nothing in excess. Just as the Iliad, the epic of the palace and the combat, shews us war's alarms and the tented field, so the Odyssey, the epic of the farmhouse, the home, and all homely things, shews us the arts of peace, the craft of man as well as the might of force, and it has too a charm'd magic casement opening on the foam of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Let us take one or two passages in the "pale and far-off shadow" of a prose translation.* "Thus he spake and led the way, and they went with him. So they brought all and stowed it in the decked ship, according to the word of the dear son of Odysseus. Then Telemachus climbed the ship, and Athene went before him, and behold, she sat her down in the stern, and near her sat Telemachus. And the men loosed the hawsers and climbed on board themselves, and sat down upon the benches. And gray-eyed Athene sent them a favourable gale, a fresh West Wind, singing over the wine-dark sea.

"And Telemachus called unto his company and bade them lay hands on the tackling, and they hearkened to his call. So they raised the mast of pine tree and set it in the hole of the crossplank, and made it fast with forestays, and hauled up the white sails with twisted ropes of oxhide. And the wind filled the belly of the sail and the dark wave seethed loudly round the stern of the running ship, and she fleeted over the wave, accomplishing her path. Then they made all fast in the swift black ship, and set mixing bowls brimmed with wine, and poured drink offerings to the deathless gods that are from everlasting, and in chief to the grey-eyed daughter of Zeus. So all night long and through the dawn the ship cleft her way."

This is no laboured passage, there is no straining after effect, but all is as clear and vivid and animated as literature can hope to be. To be so simple, so direct, and yet to leave so lasting an image on the reader's mind is a lost art. We cannot imitate it, we can but admire.

Or take a passage particularly beautiful in its native Greek, in the luscious concourse of sweet vowels, and its exquisite unstrained sentiment.

"Stranger, there is yet a little thing I will make bold to ask thee, for soon will it be the hour for pleasant rest, for him on whomsoever sweet sleep falls, though he be heavy

* The quotations are throughout from Butcher and Lang's excellent translation.

with care. But to me has the god given sorrow, yea sorrow measureless, for all the day I have my fill of wailing and lamenting, as I look to mine own housewiferies and to the tasks of the maidens in the house. But when night comes and sleep takes hold of all, I lie on my couch, and shrewd cares thick thronging about my inmost heart, disquiet me in my sorrowing. Even as when the daughter of Pandareus, the brown bright nightingale, sings sweet in the first season of the spring, from her place in the thick leafage of the trees and with many a turn and trill she pours forth her full-voiced music bewailing her child, dear Itylus, whom on a time she slew with the sword unwitting, Itylus the son of Zethus the prince ; even as her song, my troubled soul sways to and fro."

In what resides the charm and power of this ? It baffles us as we analyse it, it flees from us when we seek to grasp it. It is this very simplicity no doubt, simplicity which when genuine is so nobly attractive, in its counterfeit so sickly and disgusting, a quality so difficult to define or to attain. To hold the mirror up to nature, how easy it seems, how hard it proves. And the secret of this simplicity has been revealed to this earliest of masters, it comes to him almost, one would think, without an effort, it delights us by its very unstudied ease.

An ancient critic as we have said detected in the Odyssey signs of declining genius, and found it a tame comedy of manners compared with the high tragedy of the Iliad. No record of human life when told by genius is tame, and the history of Odysseus of the many wiles, how that he journeyed to the land of the Lotus-Eaters, and suffered many things at the hands of Polyphemus, how Æolus received him gladly and sent him on his way, how Telepylus of the Læstrygonians brake his ships and slew his goodly-greaved companions, how he endured the wiles of Circe, how in a benched ship he fared to the dark house of Hades, how he heard the song of the Full-voiced Sirens, how his company slew the kine of Helios, how the nymph Calypso kept him in her hollow caves, how he came to the Phæacians, who sent him to his own land, and how he took vengeance upon the suitors who had importuned Penelope, this tale may merit many epithets but hardly that of " tame." It was heard assuredly with vast interest by its earliest audience as they sat in the long winter nights. " Lo," says Eumæus, " the nights now are of length untold. Time is there to sleep, and time to listen and be glad ; thou needest not turn to bed before the hour ; even too much sleep is vexation of spirit." Or as the disguised Odysseus declares " verily it is a good thing to list to a ministrel such as this one, like to the gods in voice. Nay, as for me, I say that there is no more gracious or perfect delight than when a whole people makes merry, and the men sit orderly at feast in the halls and listen to the singer, and the tables by them are laden with bread and flesh, and a wine-bearer drawing the wine serves it round and pours it into the cups " Its stories are greedily devoured by children now, its combination of thrilling adventure and broad sweeps of character will endure until humanity suffers some revolutionary change. Some may prefer the battle scenes of Troy, the systole and diastole of the great struggle beneath the walls of Ilion, the exploits of the great Greek captains, but me rather, in most moods delights " that bowery loveliness," the romance of land and sea, the combat of man with the elements, his persistent resolution in adversity, his indomitable cheerfulness.

The Odyssey is in twenty-four books and contains over twelve thousand lines. A work of these vast dimensions must needs find room for many different things. First

in time and place come its fairy tales. The earlier half is a huge Märchen, in which the exploits of Odysseus braving the powers of nature, defying giants, ogres and enchantresses are told with great and interminable charm.

The contribution of the fairy tale and of romance to literature is no doubt considerable and not to be despised. It pervades Spenser; there steals out at times in Milton a vision

> " Of faery damsels met in forest wide
> By knights of Logres or of Lyones,
> Launcelot, or Pellas, or Pellenore."

But nowhere else has the legend achieved the perfect charm of the Odyssey. The true begetter of this section of the poem is—as Odysseus might have said—Οὔτις, No man; it is the anonymous spirit of the Greek race which has shaped these enchanting fictions, the epic poet has merely taken this exquisite material and given it a more finished form. The story of adventure delights us all in youth. We love to hear of peril hard upon the heels of peril, and hairbreadth escapes, " of antres vast and deserts idle, rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven . . . . and of the Cannibals that each other eat, the Anthropophagi, and men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders." We are not too discriminating in our criticism, or too squeamish in our appetite. The tale of adventure is therefore often artless. But the Odyssey is wrought with consummate art, and the character of Odysseus himself and its sustained conception would suffice to redeem the tale from triviality. Still for those whose interest in Jack the Giant-killer and his kind is soon exhausted there is the consoling prospect that the rest of the tale moves in a different region. We have not left the realm of marvellous happenings, but the hero is concerned with a design which is not more unnatural than that of wresting his house and heritage out of the hands of those who are devouring it. How he succeeded and how he lived happily ever afterwards, till he again was smitten with the lust for travel, is told in the last twelve books.

The greatest artist is in closest contact with humanity, and at many points. One of the glories of the Odyssey is that its realism is unquestionable. The age of the artificial and the sophisticated was not yet. People enjoyed their meals, they loved to put forward their hands—not their forks—to the fare prepared, and they delighted to hear how other men put from them their desire of eating and drinking, they lingered with a curious interest over the details of the cooking of a dinner, they honoured an Alcinous for his love of good fare and his hospitable temper. The Odyssey is the epic of small things. It takes us into the palace, but it also takes us to the kitchen and the steading with its byres and middens, it deals with all men, noble, base, and knavish, in something like a Chaucerian catholicity. It stands firm and rock-like because it is built upon the fundamentals of human nature. *That* is marvellously slow to change, despite the wireless telegraph, Long Berthas, gas-shells, and all the other machinations of Science applied or misapplied. The Odyssean code of ethics is not ours, its standard of comfort, its mode of life is very different, its polity was unlike, its climate, customs, modes of thought other than ours, and yet that one touch of nature which makes the whole world kin asserts its usual power. We have heard much of realists in modern days. The first, and best, and greatest of all realists is that " great unknown," the creator of the Odyssey.

A great poem asserts its power in the most subtle ways. Men may, if they will contemn its plot as mere machinery, but the cumulative effect of different episodes and sections all cohering together, all leading up to one long-discerned and long-prepared conclusion, is not to be ignored as trifling, or to be dismissed as mere contrivance. Even German acuteness has scarcely discovered any trace of faultiness in the Odyssey, and those who have wished to sunder the poem into different sections, have met with scant favour even in the fatherland. The poet plunges *in medias res*. The gods are in session and decide that Calypso shall be bidden to release Odysseus from his captivity upon her island. He builds himself a raft and after much tribulation—twenty days on the open sea—he reaches the land of the Phæacians. Meanwhile Telemachus his son goes to Sparta in search of his father, but learns little from Menelaus and Helen, though they entertain him kindly. Odysseus tells Alcinous and his court the story of his wanderings, and is then conducted in a single night to his beloved Ithaca. From this point onward the tale of his return proceeds in the leisurely style of great authors towards its due conclusion, its τέλος, the slaying of the suitors and the reunion of Odysseus and Penelope. For the first time in literature we have the interweaving of two motives, the wanderings of Odysseus and the adventures of Telemachus in the quest for this father. The poet turns from one theme to the other, he combines the different sections of his story in a way which none before had taught him, until the confluent streams of narrative unite and flow to their appointed end.

In this connection one must point out how admirably the working out of the tale of Odysseus illustrates the principles of construction to which the poet instinctively and unconsciously conformed. Odysseus returns to Ithaca disguised as a beggar, and the plot thickens at once. He is treated with disdain and contempt by all except kindly Eumæus. He has ox feet flung at him, and is the butt of the clumsy wit of the suitors, yet he is fated to overcome them all. The scene between him and Telemachus, the interview between him and Penelope at night, the dramatic recognition of him by the old nurse Eurycleia, the boding prophecies of the seer Theoclymenus to the "fey" suitors all lead up to the περιπέτεια, the reversal. It is in the great manner, the simple manner too, which only a few, including Scott in his finest novels, have ever achieved. Admittedly it is difficult to see how Odysseus and his son Telemachus and their henchmen manage to slay fifty young men who might have rushed their opponents. Here, it must be confessed, things happen after the manner of a fairy tale, and the *dea ex machina* is everywhere, now in the guise of Mentor, now flying in such fashion as a swallow flies, now holding up her destroying ægis. But standards of credibility vary in every age, and in any age they vary with the individual. The standard of the Homeric Greek is different from that of Professor Huxley or Lord Rayleigh, the standard of Lord Rayleigh is different from that of Sir Oliver Lodge. But there are many delightful touches in the delineation of Penelope's character and the situations which arise are worthy of the most skilful of the moderns—and beyond their powers.

After we pass from the most primitive epochs, the main outlines of human nature in all ages seem much the same, and the broad lineaments of human character appear to change as slowly as the great landmarks of nature, Land's End or Beachy Head. Just as Piltdown skulls and palæolithic tombs can demonstrate how little the human

anatomy has been modified in length of time, so a poet like Homer proves how much in common we still have with an age so distant and so far behind us as the Mycenæan epoch. It is a time when people have not yet learnt to be artificial or conventional. It faces from day to day the basic facts of human life, it knows how foolish it is to forget one's cloak when on outpost duty, that the nights are cold and the rime is sharp in the early morning, that times are hard for the poor—as always—it knows how kings and princes can be harsh and oppressive, how shameful it is to be constrained to send in, daily, three of one's best porkers for the insatiate youths who are courting the mistress, it knows what shameless hussies the serving maids may be. It has a special grievance against the importunate belly with its unconscionable demands, " the wretched belly, a thing accursed, that works much ill for men," that causes benched ships to be furnished, and bears men over the unharvested seas. It knows what a rough life is that of the beggar and the vagrant (even though suppliants all are of Zeus) what a bane the pirates are, and what a hankering they have to kidnap sons of princes. Education is too often mere sophistication. It teaches men to use sounding words and not to understand them, it imposes artificial modes of expression and insincere conventions. But strip off this crust and how much of the Homeric Greek is still found in the twentieth century man, above all if he lives in the country. Nearness to Earth is a great bond of union. There is something elemental, something fundamental in the types we meet in the countryside, something simply grand, and gloriously homely in the old men whom one hears conversing outside the hamlet church, or on the village green, or in the railway carriage, which one perceives to be closely akin to Eumæus the leal swineherd, or old Laertes, clothed in his patched doublet, with his clouted leggings of oxhide, his gloves and goatskin cap, that type primæval and yet abiding which Meredith has caught and marvellously rendered in his distorted way in Master Gammon and Andrew Hedger.

There is a great charm in the characters of this simpler age, an age before the microscope or the miniature painter. The artist deals in broad, big sweeps, he has no desire to anatomise and no conception of such a method. And yet his creatures walk and move about on castors like the works of Dædalus. " Then up came a common beggar, who was wont to beg through the town of Ithaca, one that was known among all men for ravening greed, for his endless eating and drinking, yet he had no force or might, though he was bulky enough to look on. Arnæus was his name, for so had his good mother given it him at his birth, but all the young men called him Irus, because he ran on errands, whensoever any might bid him. So now he came, and would have driven Odysseus from his own house, and began reviling him and spake winged words. Get thee hence old man, from the doorway, lest thou be even haled out soon by the foot. Seest thou not that all are now giving me the wink, and bidding me drag thee forth ? Nevertheless, I feel shame of the task. Nay get thee up, lest our quarrel soon pass even to blows." How clearly the scene comes before us, how vividly the speaker depicts himself. There is not in the Odyssey the modern multifariousness of type, nor the modern variety of all sorts and conditions of men in cosmopolitan cities. Many of our best beloved characters were then in embryo. King Alcinous is the original ancestor of the Fat Gentleman of Pickwick, and the King in Tennyson's "Sleeping Beauty" the "reverend dame" is the precursor of Mrs. Rouncewell, Irus himself will stand for Pistol, and Melantho for

Becky Sharp, Hortense, (the maid of Lady Dedlock), and the soubrette in general. The soul of Richard Feverel once inhabited the body of Achilles, and the bard himself was the Shakespeare, Henry Irving, and Charlie Chaplin of his time; Alcinous, what a swarm of offspring he has by others! Yet no artist ever had a finer eye for character, or a greater mastery of the art of delineation. Homer might seem to deal with only a few main types, yet all his personages live, nay! throb with vitality. They are types and yet individuals, they are individuals and yet for the subtle modern they sum up whole classes of men. Odysseus himself seems to impersonate one whole side of humanity. He is the man of affairs, handy with brain or tools, shrewd, cunning, good-natured, likeable, yet an inveterate liar. He is of the supplest, and yet no god, no goddess, no force of nature can turn him from his design, or cause him to forget clear, rugged, far-seen Ithaca. He is deceitful, unscrupulous, a romancer, cruel on occasion, and yet for once we descend from our moral platform. For his ruling passion is a love of Home. He is a good son, and a father of his people, "one that wrought no iniquity toward any man, nor spake aught unrighteous in the township, as is the wont of divine kings. One man a king is like to hate, another he might chance to love. But never did he do aught presumptuously to any man." In all his adventures, in his fight with the elements, in his struggle against the suitors, we feel that he is the protagonist of the human race. He is the great persuader, a man of rare patience, τέτλαθι δὴ κραδίη,* a man of affairs, the opportunist who will bend to the popular will if thus he may at last secure his purpose, fair and just as far as a man in hard times thwarted by an evil destiny can be, and one with a splendid eye to business. He desires no *grande passion* with a goddess or an enchantress; the homely affection of his wife who is no goddess and whose face is stained with tears is more to him. He can bide his time and pocket his pride, but when the chance comes of taking vengeance upon those who have outraged him on his own hearth, the vengeance is complete. His abiding helper is Athene, that is, if we care to allegorise, Wisdom, Prudence is ever by his side, whispering in his ear, counselling and admonishing, and furthering his plans. He is the first pan-Hellene, the first Greek statesman, and the vivid Homeric portrait was stamped on the minds of later writers as a lasting type. He "morigerates" in a way that Bacon would have admired, but he does not breathe the air of courts, he loves the sky and sea, and his face is tanned by the sun.

Achilles, we have said, is the hero of youth; in Odysseus middle-age has its hero. Odysseus has lost the impetuosity of youth but also its waywardness. He has lost some of that vividness of the senses, and swiftness of impulse which marks the early twenties, but he is almost as keenly interested in life as the hero of the Iliad, and certainly a closer observer. He *must* hear the music of the Sirens, though prudence must bid him first bind himself to the mast, he *must* revile Polyphemus. He is less self-centred than Achilles; wife, son and father are all things which pull at his soul and lead him homewards. He can break forth in rage as furiously as Moses. When Euryalus gainsays him, he has a good mind to slay him—but a better not. In general he is gifted with a marvellous patience, he is a remarkably good business man, he takes the greatest care of the rich presents from Phæacia, and is most thoughtful to bestow them in a safe place. Yet he would not have wrecked an expedition for the sake of his γέρας, his special prize,

* "Endure, my soul."

he is the incarnation of compromise, the man of tact and wiles, the great persuader. He is, to adopt the nomenclature of zoology, a wonderful, perhaps the earliest, type of the "homo sapiens."

It takes all kinds of characters to make an epic. Odysseus the contriver, the schemer the man of affairs who never loses heart, who always submits to the yoke, who does not defy facts, but gently, persistently, and oh! so patiently gets round them, has not the tragic beauty of our youthful hero, a Feverel or an Achilles, but the hearts of those who too have shouldered the yoke, and spent themselves in labour and persuasion will beat responsively to the hero, and not criticise him because he looked to his gifts.

But though Odysseus is not a youth, he has not seen three generations like Nestor, he can still bend the mightiest of bows, he is in his wiry middle-age, he is as fresh in invention and as resolute in will as ever in emergency, the Robinson Crusoe of the ancient world. His followers dwindle and dwindle, till their captain alone remains. But he is undaunted, and he has powerful friends. He swims and swims, finds shelter on a raft, and takes himself to shore with great skill when he at length finds the mouth of a fair flowing river, smooth of rocks, with a covert against the wind. He meets, not Man Friday but a bewitching maiden, and enlists her aid. He is a great man with his hands, and has made a bedstead whose post is an olive bush, which he hews and smoothes and planes and inlays until it is a marvel to behold. He never knows defeat in battle, though he loves stratagem rather than the knockout blow; he can plane with the adze, and wield the bow, and he is a skilled helmsman. Not many things in the Odyssey are more noteworthy than the loving interest which is manifested in everything connected with handicraft. Odysseus can blaze out into ferocity. Naughty serving maids win scant shrift, a suitor even when repentant finds no mercy, the son of Laertes likes to have his own way (what king does not?) but he is humane and sympathetic, a kindly master, a king who has regard for public opinion, and a leader who loves to exercise his great skill in managing men. He is above all a true Greek, and in him we can discern the lineaments of the Athenian whom a famous chapter in Thucydides portrays, and of the most ingenious and dexterous of all Athenians, Themistocles.

It is on Odysseus that our gaze is mainly fixed, but there are others, limned with not less skill. Telemachus is a fiery youngster still in the callow stage, with all the makings of a man in him, still undeveloped, still unable to restrain his passionate wrath, despite his epithet πεπνυμένος, *discreet*. But he is not destined to be the hero of an epos. He has the petulance of Achilles, like him he paces the sea shore in anger, but he is not the son of a goddess, he meets with no ennobling calamity, he comes to no sudden end. His mother is a much more significant figure. Her character is delineated with consummate skill and refinement. We must not be misled by analogies from Polynesia, such as our anthropologists provide us in profusion. How much dignity and queenliness is there in this quiet, oppressed chieftain's wife. Helen and Penelope are not squaws; they are both great ladies of rather chequered experience living in a simple age, Helen in particular with a fine tact, the charm of the splendid beauty, and a delicacy of feeling which would have made her the ruler of a modern salon. No more striking proof of the development which the Homeric age had reached can be found than in the high stage of manners which such female characters illustrate. It is not that

Penelope either does or says much. She must suffer rather than do, she must submit rather than protest, at most she stands by the doorpost of the well-builded roof holding her glistening tire before her face and listens to the minstrel or rebukes the suitors. A weary lot is hers of scornful importunity and hope deferred, for is it not ever true that men must work and women must weep? Yet in all her restraint there is the mark of a strong character. She has a refinement and a dignity of bearing which bewilders her suitors but makes them keep their distance. Few characters who take so small a part in the action of a tale impress the reader so much. Though we sit most often in the hall where suitors fill themselves with wine and wheaten bread and flesh of pigs, though the handmaids are as busy as the waitresses in a crowded restaurant, and the noise and uproar is continual, there is ever in the background and above the shouting that woman in the upper room, oppressed yet queen of all hearts, gifted with that strange power which quiet gentleness so often gives a woman, loyal and stedfast in her purpose, long-suffering, hoping against hope, discreet and reverend Penelope, *δία γυναίκων*, godlike among women.

Penelope is the skilled housewife, the exponent of the domesticities. Without her, little as she does, the Odyssey would be merely a tale of warfare and adventure. She illustrates Ruskin's view that the greatest writers all take most pains over their female characters.* It is Odysseus' house, Penelope and her womenkind, which give the Odyssey its distinctive charm and make the poem the poem—amongst many other things—of the domestic affections. Remove the scenes in the house of Odysseus and the poem would collapse.

Noblest of all other characters is Eumæus, the swineherd of high birth. Nowhere in the Odyssey does the nobility and bigness of human character stand out more sharply than in those scenes in which this simple yeoman-slave appears. The farmer derives his sustenance from Earth, he tends it, tills it, watches the seasons, and there is in consequence something great and primitive and elemental in the farmer of even the most advanced age. And as Eumæus sits by his fireside in the evening—eating hog "by the solid hower" like Andrew Hedger—communes with the hardworn vagrant his master in disguise, and meditates upon things in general and particularly upon the hardness of the times, we win a delight that only too rarely modern realists can give us. Everything human is interesting to the eye that can see in everything the essential and the permanent. We listen with ears attent to the simple, artless, recital of Eumæus' life history told as graphically as Defoe would have told it. Eumæus is a noble character, loyal to his lord and mistress, and to the young master who has gone to Sparta in quest of his father. He is shrewd withal. He pities the mendicant, entertains him—for are not all suppliants of Zeus?—but disbelieves him, for the vagrant is a Cretan, and all Cretans, as Epimenides discovered later, are liars. The stranger shall have good fare and fitting harbourage, but he need not seek to win a night's shelter by sanguine forecasts of the master's return. Yet when Odysseus at length reveals himself, Eumæus will go to death with him, with a loyalty of the antique kind when service sweat for duty not for meed. Like the poet himself, he is simple, noble and direct.

* See "Sesame and Lilies."

As lifelike, and perhaps even more charming, are the scenes amongst the Phæacians. It is a land in which the sun is always shining, and the sky is always blue, and everyone is prosperous, the land too of orchards. "And there grow tall trees blossoming, peartrees and pomegranates, and apple trees with bright fruit, and sweet figs, and olives in their bloom. The fruit of these trees never perisheth neither faileth winter nor summer, enduring through all the year. Evermore the West wind blowing brings some fruits to birth and ripens others .... There too, skirting the furthest line are all manner of garden beds, planted trimly, that are perpetually fresh, and therein are two fountains of water, whereof one scatters his stream all about the garden, and the other runs over against it beneath the threshold of the courtyard, and issues by the lofty house, and thence did the townsfolk draw water." And hard by is the high roofed hall with a gleam as it were of sun or moon, where Alcinous sits and drinks wine, "like an immortal." The fairy element is of course palpable in a story which deals with mariners who can achieve a week's journey in a single night and whose ships can be turned by an irate deity into a mountain without much comment. Yet even in this fairyland everything is to the life; Nausicaa, for instance, first and most charming of all charming girl heroines in the not too lengthy list which includes Perdita, Miranda, Rosalind, Rose Jocelyn, and Clara Middleton. Ignorant of convention, naive, with no affected reserve, yet with an innate nobility and purity which takes the heart by storm, she is delightful, even when she goes out washing. Like a heroine of Meredith's she "carries youth like a flag." Phæacia is a land where women have much influence, a land in which there is no false shame. Nausicaa goes forth with the family soiled linen and spends the whole morning at work on her brother's laundering—such is her coy pretext—though as her jocose papa sees, she is partly thinking of her own trousseau. The women live an unrestrained life out of doors, emancipated in the word's best sense, and respected, in frank fellowship with their compeers of the other sex. There is nothing nobler or more delightful in Homer than this free comradeship of the sexes which knows no taint of morbidness or prudery, so far removed from the niminy piminy of the Victorians. Nausicaa would have startled Jane Austen, for she can wash, walk and play ball, and when she sees a hero—but of doubtful pedigree—prays openly that the gods may give her such a husband. But Mrs Grundy is out of place in Phæacia. Let us ignore her shrieks and outcries, and join with Odysseus in wishing that the gods may grant her all her heart's desire, "a husband and a home and a mind at one with his may they give— a good gift, for there is nothing mightier and nobler than when man and wife are of one heart and mind in a house, a grief to their foes and a joy to their friends, but their own hearts know it best."

Such too had doubtless been her mother, kindly Queen Arete, whose aid is so needful for a suppliant and so sure to gain a favourable hearing from her spouse. And then there is good King Alcinous himself, so genial—"he must have been a jovial king"—so good natured, as regardful of his wife's opinion as a proper husband should be, a kind father though inclined to tease, a hospitable host with a warm heart for suppliants, and a prudent monarch who always carries public opinion with him, for there are ungracious folk about who will rebuke even kings' daughters. There are few things more interesting in the Odyssey than this study of early kingship, with its absence of the trappings of feudalism, and ignorance of the figments of Divine Right, even though kings

are descended from gods. It has a wholesome regard for the critics, those terrible people whose tongues are always wagging. Whether it is a royal maiden who is too free with a stranger, or a king who is too open-handed to a suppliant, " there are but too many insolent folk among the people." Phæacia, a realm sundered from all other lands, described in so vivid a vignette, is a peerless fairy region. The lustrous rays of romance bathe its high wall and towers, and its fair haven and narrow entrance, and the curved ships on either hand of the mole where all the folk have stations for their vessels, each man one for himself, where they look to the gear of the black ships, hawsers and sails, and fine down the oars, the land where all fruits grow and it is never winter. The omission of the Phæaciad would have made the Odyssey incomparably duller. It has all the charm and imaginative thrill of the " Sleeping Beauty " without Tennyson's too courtly sentiment.

The one hundred and eight suitors are less minutely delineated. Their leader is Antinous, who has all the insolence of youth without its frequent attractiveness. He is chief of his peers in counsel and in speech, it is he who ever takes the lead, whether to propose the ambushing of Telemachus on his return, or to display the overweening arrogance of the suitors. He is heedless of the claims of the weaker, cruel to his inferiors ; he would have been vulgar if he had lived in later ages. Though one or two others, Eurymachus, Polybus, and Leiodes are slightly sketched, the rest are ciphers, ne'er-do-wells, idlers, " nebulones, fruges consumere nati," indistinctly outlined because in truth, like Ripton Thompson, they have no character. We get what is all we need, a vague impression of lubberliness and loutishness, an aggregation of " cubs " such as the twentieth century can produce profusely, creatures who swagger and domineer, who are insolent to inferiors and ill-bred to servants, insufferable when they assert their importance, youths who hide their confusion however with delicate laughter not the hoarse guffaw of nowadays, and failing to win the favour of their mistress, are content to share a rapture with a serving maid. The *jeunesse dorée* of Ithaca and the neighbourhood is not so highly developed a type as modern times have evolved—men had not yet devised so many ways of wasting time and money—but they are as overweening and disdainful as one could desire, their main virtue being that they generally return home to sleep, and that right early.

Whatever else it has, the Odyssey has a unity of effect, and it is worth while noting that, whatever doubts philologists have had as to the composition of the Homeric poems, most men of letters have been convinced unitarians. There is an " atmosphere " prevailing from the first book to the last. It is not that local colour which modern writers toilsomely provide in big splashes, it is something subtler and more pervasive. The Odyssey is a harmony. We feel that we know and apprehend the Odyssean world. It is an age of curious contrasts, of polished refinement yet of crude barbarian survivals, an age in which women are respected and esteemed, more powerful and more prominent than the Athenian woman of later times. It is an age with almost settled standards of morality, though it knows the most startling reversals of fortune, and sees sons of wealthy men kidnapped and sold into slavery ; and also it is an age in which piracy is a recognised profession, and Autolycus, only two generations back, could win fame and applause because he surpassed all men in robbery and perjury. It is conversant with turbulent

nobles, ἄναχτες, who need a tight hand, and kick over the traces while the master is away, it knows of savage mutilations and barbarous revenges, and yet is thrilled when the minstrel, like to the gods in voice, strikes his lyre and chants the tale, of fallen Troy, maybe (for men prize that song the most which rings newest in their ears), or of the Calydonian boarhunt, or of the slaying of Agamemnon, for such things are the crown of the feast. It is hospitable and does not enquire of guests their business till the second day. It loves good eating, (in a princely house "it snows meat and drink,") and it approves of kindness to the poor; but it is an age in which public opinion is somewhat ahead of public practice, an age in which ethics outstrip theology, an age in which young bloods flown with insolence and wine can flout prophets and elders. It is much given to omens, it takes a simple pleasure in an eagle appearing at a propitious moment, and it is quick to detect a god in his birdlike disguise. And yet it is an age in which the political sense is developing and monarchy is limited by public opinion, and that censoriousness which is always ready to find fault with rulers. Odysseus must justify the slaughter of the suitors to the Ithacans, and this matter is so important that even a goddess must intervene. Alcinous is influential, but he fully appreciates the advantages of an approving vote, and is fully resolved to give the opposition no chance. It is because kings are resolved to give him no handle for criticism that Thersites does not appear in the Odyssey. Though kings and even swineherds enjoy rude plenty, times can be hard, and scions of noble families may be reduced to beg their bread. Neither the bard nor his hearers, nor Odysseus, are foolish enough to ignore the main chance, and Odysseus' careful attention to his presents from Phæacia wins even divine approval. Mankind a thousand years before Christ does not seem to vary an extraordinary degree from mankind nearly two thousand years after Christ. Old men were garrulous, men of all ages loved banter and the pointless jest partly redeemed by its naïveté; young men were awkward, undisciplined, inclined to swagger and to rowdiness, and serving-maids were pert and forward. We cannot feel that the life of the Odyssean age is incomprehensible. Our age is superior in material comforts, and many of the refinements and elegancies of life, but the cinema is in no way superior as a form of entertainment to the minstrel who moved his hearers to weeping or held them the long winter nights. Antinous is no worse than a Prussian Officer, and even the monster liner and the aeroplane scarcely outdo the expeditious Phæacians who, however far the journey, bear men to their destination in a single night.

It is perhaps more clear by now what qualities in the story of Odysseus have charmed so many. It takes a vast assemblage of qualities to make a poem endure through ninety generations. First, the poet is in perpetual contact with life. In the greatest poets Classicism, Romanticism, and Realism (to borrow convenient labels which somewhat artificially describe a writer's work), mingle their forces. There is in the Odyssey, even in its most marvellous passages, an all-pervading realism, a nearness to and a joyous interest in life in its most matter of fact circumstances and its homeliest details. There is that sense of the strangeness, beauty, and mystery of things which is the foundation of all genuine romance, but there is none of that spurious sentiment, that maudlin gush which too often passes for romance. The tale of the shipwrecked mariner who returns unexpectedly long after all hope has been abandoned, is an oft repeated motive in stories

of all ages and amongst all nations. It has been garnished by sugary sentiment, and veneered with deadening artificiality in the Laureate's Enoch Arden. Enoch is always reflecting *à la* Lord Tennyson, admiring the scenery of the Southern Seas *à la* Lord Tennyson. He is a mild inoffensive man whose whole attitude towards life is unnautical. He sells fish or rather " ocean spoil in ocean-smelling osier " and, as Bagehot has well pointed out, he is never obvious, prosaic, healthy, but always refined. Tennyson's art has been used here to distract us from unattractive realities. " I'm sorry for Mr. Bluebeard, I'm sorry to give him pain. But a terrible spree there's sure to be, When he comes back again." Such would have been the attitude of Kipling's character in " In Life's Handicap," such of the sailors depicted by Mr. Conrad, or Mr. W. W. Jacobs, such is not the language of the Laureate's hero, or the mid-Victorian attitude towards things which are not " nice." Life is one vast drawing-room in which are congregated Kings who endured with mild sadness conjugal infidelity, and gentle seamen with their faces washed and their hands clean, keeping in the background their " ocean spoil in ocean-smelling osiers," polite and self-complacent courtiers. It is a place where everyone, including the improper, is proper in behaviour, and the female annuitants are the moral policemen, and the curate of convention fixes the standard of manliness. But in Homer there is no sentimental fallacy. The curate has not yet been invented and the moral police are inoffensive. Some one may land on your shore—if you live near the coast—ravage your fields, burn your house, ravish your women, and kidnap your children to-morrow. If you offend powerful men you may any day make a voyage to King Echetus, who will maim and mutilate you, or you may pass from prince to slave without hope or remedy. Life is often hard, but we shall do well enough if we can get our two meals a day, and something warm to wrap us during the sharp nights when the night comes on foul with a blind moon, and Zeus rains the whole night through, and still the great West wind, the rainy wind, is blowing. Homer, being a very great poet, never forgets the primal necessities. He has no false shame at being hungry. He will describe " very carefully and slow," as becomes such serious business, how they led in a five-year-old bull, which they flayed and busily prepared, and cut up all the limbs and deftly chopped them small and pierced them with spits and roasted them cunningly, dividing the messes. "So for that livelong day," and many other days, " they feasted till the going down of the sun, and their soul lacked not the equal banquet." The equal banquet, for each must have his due portion, and it is not least of Eumæus' merits that he " well knew what was fair." Homer takes a loving interest in the cooking of a meal, and assumes that his hearers are sensible enough to do the same. He knows that the fairest maidens have good appetites, and would have approved of Mrs Fleming's recipe for healthy girls " good beef and good bread." And therefore when Nausicaa goes out to do washing, the poet sees that the luncheon basket is well filled. He is never afraid of household details. Odysseus boasts that none can vie with him in piling well a fire, in cleaving dry faggots, and in carving and roasting flesh and in pouring out wine. And we are told of the twelve women who ground the barley and the wheat (the marrow of men), and of the sweeping and sprinkling of the hall, and of the wiping of the tables clean with sponges, the cleansing of the mixing bowls and well-wrought double beakers. The old nurse

prepares a bath for Odysseus, and we must learn that she puts the cold water in first and then the hot.

It is this instinct for reality, this nearness to life, which assuredly is the cause of the poet's vividness and directness. If a poet's vision is not blurred by sentiment or false romance, if he " has his eye on the object," he can portray things in their sharpest outlines, he can hunt his quarry without much beating of the bush. It is a sense for actual things which takes one straight to the main point of a story. One could paint a picture of Eumæus' house, with its courtyard of stone, its fence of white thorn, and stakes set thick and close, and its twelve styes each for the grovelling brood of swine (" but the boars slept without ") and amongst the many valuable things which we learn from Homer is that the best way of protecting oneself against dogs is to fling oneself on the ground. The description of the sea, its terrors and its quick changes, has suggested that the bard may have sailed frequently o'er the Ægean, and one might well infer from the vividness of the narrative that he had also known the joys, and some of the trials of the swimmer. His swimmers are crusted all over with brine, and after engulfment in the floods of angry Poseidon, they bring up vast quantities of salt water.

The greatest writers illustrate the Terentian " homo sum, nihil humanum alienum a me puto."* The dictum applies with particular force to " Homer " in the Odyssey. There is in him a joy of living, a delight in human life in all its aspects, a catholicity of taste, a spring of *bonhomie* such as we scarcely find again until we come to the creator of the Wife of Bath or mine host of the Tabard. Like Chaucer, Homer is a prince among story-tellers, but he is more, incomparably, than that. There is a simple greatness of soul, a keen perception of the pathetic, a vivid sensibility to all the different notes of passion to which we can trace no parallel in the genial patriarch of English literature. For in truth it is almost Homer's greatest achievement that he has proved that the mere narrator, the teller of tales, whose first task it is to minister to the deep-seated hunger of the human soul for events and facts, can rise to the loftiest heights of poetry, and take his throne on Parnassus' topmost peak. Sagas have grown in many languages and amongst many races, but only in Greece has the saga-poet won the highest fame. Homer lived in an age which it would seem loved poetry, and was a fitting theme for poetry, and which comprised in its poetry its amusements, its mental food, its encyclopædia of knowledge, its store of wise counsels and sage exhortations. But even with these advantages and with the additional advantage of a perfect language as his vehicle, he achieved the miraculous. There is nothing, we will admit it once again, in the Odyssey like the greatest passages of the Iliad, the surge of combat, the ebb and flow of battle, the glitter and the glory of the splendid pictures of the embattled hosts, the spectacle of life grouped round them. Those who make sublimity the only test of the finest literature will be disappointed in a poem which does not set out to be sublime, but to be almost homely in its humanness. Yet as Longinus concedes in his striking phrase, there is the mellowed sunset glow, the quiet confidence of an assured mastery.

And Homer wrote in the most beautiful of all languages, and the most beautiful of all dialects of that language, with its liquid flow and play of vowels. Beside golden

* I am a man, I think nothing human foreign to me.

Greek all other languages are as silver, copper, or some baser strain. The mere charm of sound intoxicates. Homer flows and flows for ever the perfect type of his own line :

ἐκ ἀκαλαρρείταο βαθυρρόου Ὠκεανοῖο

There are no lines so massive, so monumentally sententious as many in the Æneid, there are no jewels five words long (though in Homeric Greek nearly every adjective is itself a jewel), there are no Dantean oracles, but there is a melody in Homer throughout which can be found rarely elsewhere, and which our Spenser in the Faery Queen, despite the obvious differences, alone can in some measure suggest* for English readers.

And like all great poets Homer has his criticism of life. He had not the misfortune to live in a highly introspective age in which analysis is carried to a morbid degree and atoms anatomise atoms, but he is a wide-eyed contemplator of life, of life in a simpler stage but closer to the fundamental things. Despite his pervading cheerfulness, Homer, like Goethe, knew that in this life we enact Hell. Even in that age the note of melancholy was sometimes sounded. " Of all the creatures that breathe and move upon the face of the earth, nought feebler doth the earth nurture than man. Lo, he thinks that he shall never suffer evil in time to come, while the gods give him happiness, and his limbs move lightly. But when again the blessed gods have brought for him sorrow, even so he bears it, as he must, with a steadfast heart." " Man's life is brief enough ! And if any be a hard man, and hard at heart, all men cry evil on him for the time to come, while yet he lives, and all men mock him when he is dead." Yet how much happiness—as he shows us—is there in the simpler things, in the sights and sounds of nature, in the love of man and woman, in wedlock, in the devotion of parent towards child and retainer towards master, in wine and wheaten bread, and paunches and good swine's flesh. We feel all this despite the marvellous impersonality of the poet, his self-suppression, the entire absence of subjectivity, of the " lyric cry," that aloofness beside which self revelation seems advertisement, and egotism mere folly. All the surer is the poet's judgment, all the firmer the ground on which we tread. But we are convinced that the divine minstrel who can thrill men with such delight, who can move them to tears, hold them in breathless suspense, or dissolve them in ecstacy by the charm of the Muses, himself was moved and enthralled by the spell of poetry.

Profitless as in one sense such questioning must be, one cannot leave without one word the crux of the whole matter, " who was Homer ? " " was there a Homer or an Homeric college ? " If one plunges deep into the waters of that controversy which has ever been flowing since the *Prolegomena* of Wolf in 1795, one becomes almost metaphysical enough to believe that a thing may be and not be at the same time. All great literary critics, from Aristotle down to Goethe and Matthew Arnold, have stoutly maintained the unity of the Homeric poems. We need not doubt but that in that far off age the sense of personality in literature was merely rudimentary, that difference of individuality and difference of style was not as in these modern days. Individuality of style in one sense scarcely existed—there might be and without question there was difference of genius—but that sense of self, that definition of the individual which turns the feeling of the ego into egotism was as yet unborn. There was a communistic sense of authorship which

* Of course the differences also between the rhythms of Spenser and Homer are very great.

to-day is inconceivable ; a man was not too proud to collaborate, to add his part to the great temple of the saga without even leaving his mason's mark, an *Homerus fecit.* All poets composed in the Epic style, and there is much to tempt us in an argument by analogy. Just as the Greeks, seeing the unity even in the diversity of Ionian, Dorian, Æolian, feigned that Ion, Dorus, and Æolus were the three sons of the original Hellen, so perchance when men found that the Homeridæ, to whom was entrusted the Epic heritage, dwelt in many cities, they invented an original Homer who naturally was claimed as a native by every city where the Homerids were strong.* So with the Hebrew writings too. In many of the prophets we find insertions and additions plainly of a later age and by a different author. He who interpolated in the book of Isaiah or the prophecies of Jeremiah his own warnings and denunciations was well content if he could edify his own contemporaries. He sought not fame with posterity, he was conscious of inflicting no wrong upon the original writer. Copyright, and the conception of plagiarism did not exist. We can proceed best by negatives ; the antinomy may never be resolved. That the Iliad and the Odyssey consist of different strata clearly defined, that they are composed of various lays with their accretions roughly stuck together, which by some miracle combined into a marvellous poem, is incredible. That the poems sprang full grown from the head of some single bard, that the story suffered no rehandling, that no addition, no removal, no expurgation was ever experienced, that it has been transmitted verbally entire, or nearly so, without change of idiom or of dialect, it is madness to believe. We see in the Iliad and Odyssey that unity of effect and that unity of tone which in all other cases we attribute to the energies of a single mind. That the Epic Sagas were the growth of centuries, that they were wrought at in very truth by the whole Greek race, that they were sifted, and winnowed, and purged, till the adventures of Odysseus became indeed the Odyssey, and the tale of Troy became indeed " the tale of Troy divine " is beyond all reasonable doubt. That some time in this process there came a great poet, or two great poets, who achieved the Iliad or the Odyssey such as we know them, that it is they who gave these poems those great qualities which put them beyond and above the numerous other Epics which flourished once and now are gone, is true unless great poetry owes its being to accident.

That the Odyssey in particular is a product of consummate art is generally admitted. The skill is ever present but never obtruded. It is rather an exquisite sense of the fitting, a feeling for proportion, a tact which in the development of the story gives to each thing its due share and no more—for like Eumæus the bard knew well what was fair—than laboured and avowed craftsmanship. It is a marvel that in this early age, without a model save the efforts of unknown predecessors, the poet or poets of the Homeric age weave together a double strand. The main section of the narrative, the adventures of Odysseus, his home-coming, and his vengeance upon his foes, is most skilfully united to that of the journey of Telemachus in quest of his father, and the two stories combine in one when Odysseus and Telemachus meet at last. It is a thrilling story of adroit management and hairbreadth escapes with a *dea ex machina* to aid—in which virtue finally triumphs and overweening pride meets its Nemesis. The tale moves on in the leisurely

* See on this point Thompson's " Studies in the Odyssey."

style in which great authors delight, till Odysseus at length regains Ithaca. He is at once encompassed by perils more dire than those of his previous journeyings. Telemachus on his return from Sparta meets his father at Eumæus' steading and they concert a plan. Odysseus disguised as a beggar goes to his own house, and a scene as striking follows as the scene in "Ivanhoe" when Rebecca and Isaac of York appear in the castle of Cedric at the revels of his Norman guests. Homeric manners are not of a finer pattern here; Odysseus receives an ox's foot, a missile rather than a present, and is forced to contend in pitched battle with Irus, the greedy bully. Odysseus persuades the suitors to try to bend his bow, himself handles it, and the carnage begins. The revels of the suitors, the omens which portend their fate, his wife's hesitation but final recognition of him, all lead to the appointed conclusion. Odysseus is restored as king, and his old father may spend his declining years in peace. It is not merely the art which is concerned with planning the development of a story and with making its several parts cohere that is found in the Odyssey, important as such skill is in every large poem. The art is all-pervading, it is found on every page and in almost every line, it is the art which knows how to conceal itself. It is so spontaneous and unaffected, and yet it can outdistance the cleverest young men of the early twentieth century. It has a wonderful organ to play upon, and can illumine the most ordinary things with the light of another world, it can transform even a catalogue into a thing of sheer beauty, it can be matter of fact and yet be noble. To it nothing is too low or too strange or too odd for poetry, and yet all is transmuted into fine gold. It is not descriptive in the modern sense, it does not seek to exploit to the full all the possibilities of pathos and sentiment which a situation may contain; the godlike bard is bewildering in his common sense. Compare the description of the sacrifice (Book III), a picture in which every figure stands out in the sharpest outline, with the celebrated passage in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn."* compare the grotto of Calypso in Book V. with any highly wrought description in Tennyson, and the superiority of what Bagehot called the pure style as compared with the ornate style is manifest at once. There are many incidental beauties in the Odyssey, the wailful lamentation of the nightingale, the description of the Elysian plain, of Phæacia, and a host of others, but they are merely incidental, they come, they pass, and they are gone. They arise naturally, they are not sought after as chances for display, the poet does not linger over them. *We* seem to be forbidden these methods of a simpler age. We can but stretch out our hands in admiration over the gulf of time and thought and manners which separate us, and seek for a brief moment to recall all the grace and glory of the Juventus Mundi.

We shall not then judge the Greek Epic by its fine passages, though fine and even brilliant passages it has. The whole is greater than the part however splendid, and the effect of the whole is what constitutes a great long poem. Greatness does not depend on purple patches, it is rather the texture of the whole that matters. Indeed, the phrase *purpureus pannus*, purple patch, condemns itself. A literary work is not a patchwork quilt, a fantastic motley of delightful hues, it is a unity and a harmony. Our verdict on the Odyssey or the Iliad may not be a judgment on a particular book or books, it

* Of course many of us like Keats and his rich fare better than Homer's simpler but better food. Yet Homer is the greater. Keats has *not* the classical spirit. That does not mean that we should not admire him, but we must not admire him for the wrong reasons.

must be based on the cumulative effect of the whole work, and that will be a thing both greater than and different from the sum of the effect of all the different parts. There is one parallel, one single parallel perhaps, in modern times, in that glorious epic of two dozen volumes known to us as the Waverley Novels. Scott in many points of artistry is plainly inferior in his mastery of language, he is no lapidary of finely chiselled speech, he wrote in prose not verse, in English and not in Greek, and in a poor North British species of English often slipshod, journalistic, and even ungrammatical, though by reason of a simple nobility of nature which delighted in everything connected with his fellow man he may be rightly called most Homeric of modern writers. Yet the critic who reads but one or two of the Waverley novels and doubts and hesitates, will find, if he passes on to eight or a dozen, that he must bow before the spell of the Wizard of the North. A novelist of vogue who, with diligence at least praiseworthy, puts out his couple of novels in a twelvemonth, recently delivered himself of the dictum that the world—and no doubt hard-worked novelists—had not time to read such novelists as George Meredith. Such a disability extends doubtless to long poems as well as to romances. But Homer, like many of the great narrators, will have none of such heresy. He knows that all things have their end, but that delightful things may end too soon. He goes his own pace, and he takes his time.

What is the secret of the charm which has enthralled so many generations? It is again and again a charm based on the homely, common things, appealing to the simplest, which are the profoundest, feelings. The wanderer meets his mother in the underworld. "O mother mine, what fate of death has subdued thee?" And he is told: "not Artemis slew me with her kindly shafts, and no disease has come upon me, but yearning for thee, and care for thee, O glorious Odysseus, 'tis this that has reft from me my life." Or again, the king disguised as vagrant enters his own house. Argos, a youthful hound when his master had departed, lies now despised upon a midden, full of sores. Twenty years have passed since last he saw Odysseus, yet now the faithful brute recognises, alone recognises him. Worn out by age, neglected, he wags his tail, and pricks his ears, too weak to do more. Dangerous though it may be to do so, his master weeps at the spectacle. He passes in, and the fates of death overtook Argos immediately. Nothing is more odious and unreal than that poodle love which is manifested is such things as Matthew Arnold's "Geist's Grave," and the poem of Martial on the puppy which never misdemeaned itself in its master's drawing-room. Here there is something more real and more respectable. Homer would have been quite unmoved by Sterne's dead donkey—except in so far as it was disagreeable to his nose. He does not leave out the midden because it is indelicate, nor does he expatiate on the sores because they heighten the pathos of the situation, but he feels that even a dog, when it is faithful, deserves a memorial, and he is versed in canine as well as human nature. The thing is told and done with, but even because he refuses to squeeze out the last drop of the pathetic, he touches us the more.

An austere Athenian historian declared that nobility was one of the essential elements of simplicity. Homer had demonstrated the truth some centuries earlier. There is nothing of the false heroic in the Odyssey. It is in the similes that the poet's wide range of allusion is best evident. He is not quaint, or low, and scarcely grotesque, for grotesqueness

perhaps implies a certain oddity in the possessor of the quality. But Homer has no sham dignity. He will compare the texture of a garment to the skin of a dried onion—an analogy which would have shocked Pope—and does not hesitate to describe a certain henchman as round-shouldered, brown-skinned, and curly haired. It is not to lofty tastes quite dignified, but we have Eurybates limned in as lifelike a manner as the Pardoner. The panic-stricken suitors are compared to a drove of kine harassed by the gadfly, their assailants to vultures of crooked claws and curved beak. A sleepless man tossing in bed a is paunch full of fat and blood turned before the fire in order to roast the better, and a fit of sullenness is likened to a bitch pacing round her whelps and growling, which is at any rate graphic. When the comrades of Odysseus lament they are compared to calves lowing and skipping before their dams. These graphic similes do not affect us as they affected their original hearers, but others delight us by some sudden and unexpected turn of thought. Odysseus is fain to return to Ithaca, as he will at sunset; we are given a vivid extract from the annals of the poor, as true and as arresting now as then. " And as when a man longs for his supper, for whom all day long two dark oxen drag through the fallow land the jointed plough, yea and welcome to such an one the sunlight sinketh, so that he may get him to supper, for his knees wax faint by the way, even as welcome was the sinking of the sunlight to Odysseus." Another touching comparison appears when Odysseus is within sight of land after much tribulation. " And even when as most welcome to his children is the sight of a father's life, who lies in sickness and strong pains long wasting away, some angry god assailing him; and to their delight the gods have loosed him from his trouble; so welcome to Odysseus showed land and wood." It is as simple and pathetic as Euripides " the human," only more so.

Our poet is no preacher, though the Odyssey, like the Iliad, soon became a textbook of morals and good manners, which the Greek boy studied from his earliest years and some times knew by heart. The poem evidences a simple though not shallow faith that things in the end will come right, and that good will triumph. There is no unreasoning optimism; the poet was in too close contact with human nature for that. He admired the gods as some admire the grand world of fashion, smiling at or ignoring its peccadilloes. He thereby incurs the wrath of Plato, whose austerity could not brook any laxity on such matters, even in a poet. But despite Plato Homer's general tendency is as elevating as one ould wish, and no poet has shown more plainly that he thought nobly of human nature. It is an incurable habit of the human race to hunt for allegories and hidden meanings. Even Horace, who discourses about the Odyssey in a pleasing satire, cannot debar himself from moralising on the steadfastness of the man of Ithaca, to whom his little island and his homely spouse were more beloved than a goddess's grotto. But it is ill work to turn great literature into moral discourses, and we can look elsewhere for homilies on the abuse of wine and other excursions into ethics.

When Homer had been turned into heroic verse after the best Popeian models by the waspish bard and his hired (but ill paid) auxiliaries, a natural reaction led men to emphasise the simplicity of the Greek Epic. True as this view is in its place, it does not involve the absence of all art. It is its splendid story that first won length of life for the Odyssey, but it was that wonderful artistic sense which all Greek authors seem to have that perpetuated it, and preserved it still pre-eminent when the Cyclic poets were all

forgotten. Homer is full, but rarely prolix, and rarely grotesque. He is not infantile, he has not the "simplicity" of the idiot boy. For this reason we are constrained to classify him quite apart from the ballad writers. To compare the Odyssey to a collection of ballads is entirely to mislead. Arnold showed his insight not least when he refused to put the author of the history of the man of many wiles who wandered far and wide and saw many cities of men and suffered many woes within his heart, beside the naïve inventor of "Now Christ thee save, thou proud porter," or beside the modern who evolved "And scarcely had she begun to wash, When she was aware of the grisly gash, Above his knee that lay." Simple as the point of view of the poet was, it was still the point of view of a great artist with a wide experience of life. And he was skilled to portray types that still endure and still delight. His characters, in the modern slang, "convince." The admirers of "The Idiot" doubtless claim for its author classic rank. Take any passage of the Odyssey and compare it with the chapter in which Rogojin and his gang visit Nastasia Philipovna and buy her hand with 100,000 roubles. They laugh, they yell, they scream, they jump on chairs to view the burning of the 100,000 rouble notes, which finally are not burnt. And all this frenzied behaviour, which would not be permitted in a London publichouse, even near Waterloo,* takes place in a St. Petersburg society drawing-room. We are separated from the one writer by nearly thirty centuries, from the other by a bare fifty years, and yet Eumæus, Arete, Antinous are natural and credible, the others are barbarians, untutored, uncivilised, who will need some centuries yet of tendance before they can enter the comity of nations.

Constantly in reading the Odyssey we are reminded of other achievements in literature widely differing. It is a proof of the poet's universality. Now we have a fairy tale such as Jack the Giant-killer or one of the Arabian Nights, now some reflection on man's frailty will recall to us the Psalms. Stevenson would have loved to tell the tale of the kidnapped boy and the false frail nurse and the mysterious Phœnician and his secret signal; Victor Hugo's Guernsey hero Gilliatt's battles with the devil-fish do not excite our interest more than Odysseus' woes upon the sea. The great Robinson Crusoe himself was not more skilful with his hands, more of a philosopher perhaps, but more long-winded, and Adam Bede was not a defter man with the adze, the planing tools, and the saw. We have a picture of human life stripped of all its conventions, and therefore appealing to all. In truth it is human nature in its broad outlines which is the proper subject of all poetry, and wherever the poet's genius can disentangle the essential from the inessential, and lift out the permanent from the impermanent, there is deathless literature. The great poet has his spell like the Faery Prince of Tennyson. He can cut through the brake, the close-matted burrs and briars of pedants and of sciolists, he comes and brings the magic word and makes "the long-pent stream of life dash downward in a cataract."

Or shall we say that every great poem is an eternal Now, and that genius has charms which can call back to the realms of life even those who have gone down to the House of Hades? The poet gives then the wine of genius and the red blood courses through their veins again. Once more Odysseus lives, and Penelope, and honest Eumæus. Once more we seem to wait, and wait in vain for the homecoming of him of the many

* Written in War-time.

wiles. It is afternoon, and the suitors are gathered in the halls of Odysseus. It is afternoon, and the sun shines in full splendour. The time of feasting will come, but not yet. The noble wooers are flaying goats and singeing swine, getting ready the banquet. Eumæus has brought three fatted boars, the best in all the flock, Melanthius tethers the goats beneath the echoing gallery, and Philœtius brings a barren heifer and fatted goats. Some suitors take their pleasure in casting of weights and of spears, they listen to the wrangling of Irus and a plaguey vagrant, they cast the quoit, they boast, they laugh delicately. The boy Telemachus looks on, his face flushed with anger. Scarce can he restrain his passionate fury, silently he vows vengeance while Antinous jeers at him. The reverend housewife strives to keep the wanton queans in order, and chides the pertest and most forward. And now they put the swine's flesh on the fire, they roast, and draw all off. They sit them down in rows, and the henchmen pour water on their hands, and the maidservants pile wheaten bread by them in baskets, and pages crown the bowls with drink. They put forth their hands to the goodly feast, they shout approval of the minstrel. At last the sun sets, and all the ways are darkened, and homeward they repair. What if to-morrow discreet Penelope declare her mind ?

VERRES

1917

Rascaldom and villainy have their types and ideal forms no less than the virtuous and saintly. To be " absolute in one's numbers," to be the *ens* of baseness, the *ne plus ultra* of knavery, the apotheosis of thievishness, is in itself a distinction which calls for the admiring contemplation of beholders who can marvel, momently unmindful of their moral sense, at a quality purged of all dross of virtue, purified of all alloy of excellence. It is with such respectful admiration that we behold the lineaments of the immortal Pecksniff, the monumental embodiment of a nation's hypocrisy, it is with not less deep regard that we can contemplate the consummately limned visognomy of Gaius Verres.

The delineations which stamp their impression longest on the mind are those which are wrought on a grand scale, a mighty canvas with an infinity of small touches. The cumulative effect of such transcends by far the sharply etched *in petto* sketches of a few lines or pages, difficult as one's impression is at times to materialise in words. We have a more real conception of a character spread over a whole novel than of a character portrayed in a dozen lines. And here in the heart of classicism, least where we should have expected it, embedded in the works of the great Tully, exemplar of the Classical spirit, is a picaresque romance of the ancient world, which takes us by some odd unstudied whim of Fortune, on a tour *via* the *cursus honorum* through the provinces of Rome in a way that Le Sage might have envied, revealing to us the fortunes of a hero who was a villain, rake, a petty thief, a grandiose robber, and a Roman magistrate.

For the first time in the recorded history of man was a character portrayed after this gigantic fashion. Rome of the golden period of its literature had no novel form, but the Verrine speeches were some compensation and a substitute. All Roman literature seems based on rhetoric. And the speech form, aided by the wonderful complaisance of the Roman Law of evidence, has here shown a wideness of scope and a plasticity in execution which we should have deemed incredible without this dazzling example. The massive cliff-like language is fashioned and polished with a wondrous perfection of expression, it is an overpowering revelation of the might of language which makes all life its province. The heavy, stiff, ungainly Latin of the early age has become the most malleable of things. The whole diapason of emotion is sounded, every resource of trope and figure called into play as occasion serves. The scathing acid of unrestrained invective, the stiletto sharpness of the sudden thrust, impassioned apostrophe, broad irony, cruellest ridicule—and no greater hardship has villainy than that it makes men ridiculous—the light jest, and the noblest grandeur of language, all are enshrined in this wondrous monument to the power of speech. No wonder Rome flocked to such an entertaining spectacle, or that Verres at length robbed his spectators of an almost gladiatorial delight. He was too wonderfully limned. Gallant, connoisseur, high adept in the art of winning blood from stones, skilled manipulator of forms and precedents, he almost stares out of the canvas at us. A fly embalmed in amber is a charming spectacle, but the fate is unwelcome to the fly.

The weakness of the biographical romance is its lack of backbone, its succession

which is not a sequence. Even with the greatest of its exponents the yawn may follow the laugh. In the *Gesta Verris* the yawn rarely is heard. In the variation of manner the orator is supreme. There is the grand impassioned style, the artful prelude of alluring interest, the apologies for lengthiness, and the promises not to be tedious, the light conversational digression, most finished in its art and ease, the mocking commentary, the elaborate highly-organised period, the swift, sharp, rapier strokes of dialogue, gossip about Cicero himself, topics of the day deftly introduced, and ever and anon some grand passage which knits all together and reinforces the theme in burning words which show a power of swaying men rarely equalled combined with a never equalled art, and behind it all the vivid sympathy, the ardent temperament, and the imaginative intensity which alone achieve great oratory or great literature. " Cedant arma togæ, concedant laurea laudi." There was some justice in the lines.

But another line, of Ennius's, suggests itself " Moribus antiquis stat res Romana viresque." It was a noble old line, and Rome's true strength *was* based on morals of the olden time. But Rome was living on its moral capital, was indeed long bankrupt when Verres went to Sicily. If there is anything of the comic in the Verrine speeches—and there is certainly such an element—it is a tragi-comedy, as Cicero was aware. Rome had made its provinces into the similitude of a milch cow. Its tax-farmers and its governors, jointly or in combination, robbed the provincials of their hard-gotten gains ; an empire was a valuable asset. That millions might suffer to gratify the pride of a dominant race, or to glut the greed of a clique of *nobiles* was a wrong which Rome only in spasms of philanthropy ever regarded. "Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento." And, alas ! though the haughty were quelled, the vanquished were not always spared, and the law of peace not always imposed.

Verres then was not an innovator—as he no doubt often exclaimed to sympathising circles of Massilians. He was merely the *reductio ad absurdum* of the Roman system. Let old ideals of honesty and equity be flung into the waste basket, let the principles of Cato be superseded by the practice of Tammany, let ' graft,' oppression, brutal contempt of law prevail, and we shall have the Augean stable which Augustus, to his eternal honour, swept away. Verres was merely a man of disreputable antecedents whose open flouting of the decent conjoined with a certain ingenuity and waggishness which shocked the more hypocritical, lighting upon an orator whose extraordinary range of expression comprised wit, impassioned eloquence, stinging invective, and a satiric power such as no Roman had previously manifested, won him an immortal notoriety. He was not such a noble swashbuckler as Milo, nor such a frenzied revolutionary as Catiline—why be so when there are provinces to loot ?—nor such an able man as Antony, but he can take a leading place in Cicero's gallery of worthies.

We do not hate him. The interval of twenty centuries assures him of a sheltering Statute of Limitations. We canonise our rogues, if they are bad enough, though they must tread the Via Dolorosa to Tyburn gibbet ere our lenity is assured them. Jack Sheppard has never lacked his train of sympathisers ; others beside De Quincey have chuckled with grim glee over classic instances of Murder as a fine art. We lovingly cull choice garlands of villainy as we turn over the 350 pages of this epic of rascaldom and oppression. Let us glance at our hero's progress.

VERRES

Verres started his career as quæstor, a suitable office, for the quæstor kept the money chest. The struggle between Marius and Sulla was in full swing. The quæstor finally left his consul Carbo, and the money disappeared, except 600,000 sesterces which were "deposited at Ariminum." As Ariminum was sacked, the Verrine ingenuity in devising modes of peculation shone forth as brilliantly in this first essay as ever in his later enterprises.

He was now to serve his apprenticeship of knavery in the provinces. His journey to Cilicia, where he was to be legatus of Dolabella, was like the passage not of a Roman legatus but "a devastating plague." Being in need of money—a frequent case one would suspect—he demanded aid of a magistrate at Sicyon. The magistrate refused and was left half dead, almost stifled by a fire of green and damp logs which Verres had kindled in a narrow place. At Lampsacus there was a bold case of attempted outrage, vividly told, and listened to, no doubt, with breathless attention. The honour of Philodamus' daughter was assailed in her father's own house. There was a riot when the Lampsacenes came to the rescue, a lictor was killed, some slaves and the chief pimp Rubrius were wounded. This was intolerable. Philodamus and his son—wicked creatures who defended themselves—were after trial by set form adjudged guilty of death, and met their end in the forum of Laodicea. It is but a slight matter that when Verres reached Myndus he took a fancy to a small boat sent by the Milesians to escort him, appropriated it, sold it, and sent the crew home on foot, Nor is it strange to find that this thief knew no honour, and that when he returned he turned King's evidence and gained his chief's conviction.

So the leisurely record of misfeasance takes its course. Verres now became prætor, and reaped a golden harvest. The administration of justice offered unequalled facilities for money making. Verdicts were sold, Chelidon, his mistress, obtained and reversed decisions with equal facility. Principle and system mattered nothing, as the cases of Asellus and Olympus showed. But the jewel of his prætorian decisions was that concerning *sarta tecta exigenda*, the repair of public buildings. Junius, who had been responsible for the well being of the temple of Castor, died. The temple was handed over in perfect repair to the prætor. One of his "dogs" remarked that there was nothing to be done here except to bring the pillars to the perpendicular. Verres' researches had not extended to geometry, and he needed enlightenment. But he soon grasped the brilliancy of the idea, had the contract for re-setting the pillars, which could have been done for 80,000 sesterces, given out at 560,000, a profit of 480,000 gained by the adroit use of applied mathematics.

But all these achievements were only the prelude to his crowning work in Sicily. Sicily was a province of great fertility, occupied by a thrifty and hard-working race, so devoted to Rome that even a tax-farmer or a trader was not unpopular there! It was a very profitable province, all the more useful by reason of its "suburbanity." It was this province, inhabited by such a submissive people, that a course of unscrupulous exactions and unblushing rapacity was to reduce to an untilled desert. Even the Sicilians lost their love of the Roman tax-farmer, and visited Verres with curses not loud but deep. Finally such was the general insecurity produced by this deliberate and systematic chicanery, that all refused to till estates which brought them only ruin, and Verres' successor had to implore his subjects to return to their farms and make abundant sowings, promising them to sell the tithes according to the Hieronian law. Pressure was brought to

bear upon him, and he in consequence threw every obstacle in Cicero's way. But there are limits to the oppressor's power, limits to the endurance of the most long suffering, and all the states of Sicily, save the Mamertines (who were the accomplices of Verres) were to be found at Rome, assembled to bear witness against their tyrant and to behold with exultation his downfall.

The young and rising Cicero was invited to plead the cause of Sicily, and despite the manœuvring of Verres, who sought to find an accuser who would let him off lightly, he was appointed prosecutor by the court. A speedy trial was everything. Cicero was given one hundred and ten days for collecting evidence, but he was ready within fifty (August, 70 B.C.). Even so Verres was still playing for a draw; next year the circumstances would be more favourable. Then Cicero made the greatest sacrifice an advocate can make. His brilliant exposition, his burning denunciations, his thrilling peroration, all these did he surrender. He proceeded at once to call his witnesses. In three days Verres saw that the game was up, and withdrew to Massilia. The case was finished in his absence. He was condemned to exile and a heavy fine. Cicero published his speeches, and the impassioned Verrines stand somewhere near the " divine Philippics."

Those who call Cicero a mere word-spinner must admit that his energy did not fail him here, nor later in the matter of Catiline. Success, alas! is baneful to many. To Cicero all his life after his consulship in 63 B.C. was an anticlimax. " O fortunatam natam me consule Romam." Like Cæsar, he had lived enough for glory. But the jaded, tedious, disheartened " laudator temporis acti " was once the energetic ambitious young barrister who had a great career before him, the most brilliant career in the pacific arts that Roman ever had. " The last infirmity of noble mind " great technical accomplishment, the piteous plight of the Sicilians—for his zeal was not all selfishness—all combined to achieve an overwhelming triumph.

But plunder, peculation, rapacity and outrage are not merely themes for brilliant rhetoricians. It was the inherent weakness of the situation that well-meaning men like Cicero, despite their own humanity and high principles, were mainly occupied in bolstering up a criminal system, in trying to heal a gangrened body politic. The senate and the equites, the nobles and the capitalists had thought of empire merely in terms of gold and silver, they deemed imperialism simply a profitable speculation. But tyranny ruins the tyrant as well as the subject, and the Nemesis of Republican Imperialism was that it engendered avarice, cruelty, faithlessness, and the coarsest materialism, and that the old loyalty to one's fellow citizens, the old devotion to country, the old virtues of thriftiness and self-denial seemed an empty dream. The Republic perished, to the woe of the Old Guard of grinding capitalists and grasping oligarchs, but to the joy of millions. For the people that had walked in darkness now saw a great light, and the poet of the new era could give utterance to a new policy as well as his own pious, loving instincts, when he spoke of sparing the subject, and of learning to succour the wretched: ("haud ignara mali miseris succurrere disco"). Even in dealing with the brilliance, the wit, the satire, and the onset of the Verrines, our last thought should be of the tears of human things.

"Sunt lacrimæ rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt."

TWO PLAYS OF ARISTOPHANES

1913-1914

The Comic Spirit has its manifestations in every age and in every clime. Different as its outside semblance may be, Humour is, one would hope, to be found everywhere. Scientists have sought to find in Humour that quality which distinguishes man from the brute beast, thinkers with visionary and prophetic eye have declared that when the perfect man arrives he will be found to possess, perhaps as his master quality, a perfect, an exquisite, sense of Humour.

The humorist is never merely a funny man. It is sometimes the very tension of the seriousness of things that makes him shriek with laughter rather than with agony. At times the great humorist, like the great writer of any sort, must see life steadily and see it whole. It is because Aristophanes was in contact at so many points with the life of the most gifted city that the world has ever seen, that his works are of such abiding interest. Contemporary politics, the suffrage question, current literary and æsthetic controversies, current scandal, religion, the Mysteries, the war that was bleeding Athens white, philosophy, genuine or quack, the iniquities of the very great, and the peccadilloes of the very little—all is fish that comes into his net. In Aristophanes we see Athenian life at its best and at its worst. In these dramas are focussed in a picture of dazzling brilliance everything that could interest the Athenian of the day. Like the Roman Juvenal, Aristophanes could have claimed that he had gathered into his plays in one gigantic hotchpotch all the desires and passions, all the crimes and weaknesses, all the freaks and phantasies of mankind, and had made of them one huge laugh.

Aristophanes, the greatest Athenian writer of Comedies, and in the opinion of many critics the greatest comic poet that the world has seen, was born half-way through the fifth century before Christ, and his literary activity ranged between the years 427 and 388 B.C. He is the best representative of the " Old Comedy " of Athens, the Comedy which is a humorous medley of politics, satire, and invective, a mirror of the life of the age in all its manifold activities. In the course of time such freedom of attack became unpopular, and the " Old Comedy " developed into the very different and far tamer " New Comedy," of which Menander was the best exponent, aiming at the delineation of different types of humanity, and eschewing all excursions into politics.

Comedy in Aristophanes' time fulfilled many functions. It was press, platform, pulpit, and " Mr. Punch " in one. It is the best expression of Athens' greatest privilege, freedom of speech, and those who regret the strictness of the modern law of libel would have found Athens a Paradise. Aristophanes was not in sympathy with the democratic advance which marked his age. Yet in spite of his violent attacks on political opponents, he contrived to escape serious hurt, and no more striking proof of the tolerance of the Athenian democracy can be given than the fact that year after year the citizens assembled in their theatre to listen to and to laugh at his denunciations of their policy and his censures of their failings. Except for the meetings of the popular assembly, the stage was the only convenient place for the free expression of opinion on all matters under the sun, and liberally did the comedians avail themselves of their privileges. Aristophanes

is adverse to everything new, whether in politics, the Drama, or ideas, and he vehemently attacked two great pioneers of human thought, " Euripides the human," the tragedian whom he so violently yet so divertingly caricatures, and Socrates, the creator of Philosophy. He is a comic writer, with wonderful flashes of poetry, and his plays, with their exuberance of humour, their swift transition from subject to subject, caused Heine, the great German who was so much in sympathy with him, to compare them in a striking passage to " a fantastically ironical magic tree, springing up with blooming ornament of thoughts, with singing nightingales and climbing, chattering apes." But a brilliant English critic, J. A. Symonds, has summed Aristophanes up in a still happier judgment : " Granted that he was more of a Merry Andrew than a moralist, we must surely be blind if we fail to recognise the deep undernote of good sense and wisdom which gives eternal value to his jests—worse than blind if we do not honour him for valiant and unflinching service in the cause which he had recognised as right . . . . Aristophanic comedies are in one sense a radiant and pompous show, by which the genius of the Greek race chose, as it were in bravado, to celebrate an apotheosis of the animal functions of humanity—visions, Dionysiac day-dreams from which the nation woke and rose and went about its business soberly, until the Bacchic flutes were heard again another year."

The mere outline of a play will suffice to show how different were the tastes of the Athenian average man from those of his compeer to-day. A performance of a play was a religious ceremony as well as an æsthetic delight, but, just as in the Middle Ages the Lord of Misrule held Saturnalia for a brief space, during which nothing human or divine was exempt from the jester's criticism, so in Greek Comedy we must not expect to find all our gods dignified or respectable. Such is the dearth of tragic poets in the world above, that Dionysus, the god of wine, is going to the under-world to bring back Euripides. He is accompanied by his slave Xanthias mounted on an ass. The god asks advice of the hero Heracles, who has been there before, and inquires the best inns, shops, and places of refreshment. He is told by Heracles, who delights to frighten him, that he will at length reach an enormous lake of fathomless depth, fare for transit two obols (about three pence). God and slave proceed toward the lake and attempt to persuade a dead man on the same errand bent to carry their traps. But they fail to come to terms, and the corpse at last roundly declares, " Strike me alive if I take that." Xanthias, a far finer fellow than his master, nobly consents to trudge on with the luggage, and they at length reach Charon the ferryman, finding him bawling out, " Who's for the rest from every pain and ill? Who's for the Lethe's plain? " Slaves are not taken aboard, and therefore poor Xanthias has to walk round. Dionysus gets in, sits on an oar, and otherwise behaves as a landlubber, profiting little from Charon's instructions in the noble art of oarsmanship. As soon as they start they hear the lovely strains of a batrachian chorus, which sings a chant with a burden of " Brekekekex, koax, koax," a close representation, as travellers tell us, of the Greek frog's croak. This interruption puts Dionysus out, and a heated dialogue between the god and the chorus ensues. The Frogs are skilled lyrists, as the following extracts from Roger's brilliant translation will show :—

" Loud and louder our chant must flow.
Sing, if ever ye sang of yore,

When in sunny and glorious days
Through the rushes and marsh-flag springing
On we swept, in the joy of singing
Myriad-diving roundelays.
Or when fleeing the storm, we went
Down to the depths, and our choral song
Wildly raised to a loud and long
Bubble-bursting accompaniment "

Dionysus mockingly screams out the refrain, but the chant continues until the journey is ended. When Xanthias joins him the adventures of the pair really begin. Xanthias vows that he sees a monster before them. Dionysus gets behind him. The monster is transformed into a charming maiden, and Dionysus is to the fore again. The Chorus of those who have been initiated into the Mysteries is now heard, and it gives utterance to a strain of charming poetry such as is often found mingled with Aristophanes' wildest merriment. The members of the Chorus rehearse in full those solemnities which it had been their delight to perform in the upper world—their procession, their hymns to Persephone, Demeter and Iacchus, and their departure to the Thriasian plain. The wayfarers now knock at a door which is opened by Æacus, porter to the infernal deities. When the latter sees Heracles, as he thinks—for Heracles has lent Dionysus his lion-skin and club—his rage is unbounded, and Dionysus is threatened with all Hell's most fearful punishments. While Æacus goes to fetch his ministers of torment, Xanthias at Dionysus' request hurriedly changes his attire. Straightway a serving maid enters who accosts Heracles-Xanthias in the most alluring way, and presses him to come in to the luxurious dinner which is just ready and piping hot. This will not do for Dionysus, and another lightning change is effected. But now an irate landlady appears with painful recollections of Heracles' guzzling propensities, and of the huge bill which he had run up and forgotten to settle. Between her and her servant Plathane the pseudo-Heracles gets well abused, and the viragos declare that they will each summon to their aid their favourite politician. Æacus now arrives, and not knowing which is the god and which the serving man, belabours both lustily. The pair show much ingenuity in explaining away their cries of anguish, and the perplexed door-keeper at length refers the matter to his master Pluto, who, being a god, will know at once.

After a noble Parabasis, an address to the audience on all things in general, in which the poet appeals to his fellow-citizens to be guided by their wisest men in the great struggle with Sparta which was then running its course, we have a second part in which the rival claims of the great tragic poets Æschylus and Euripides are canvassed. Each poet presents samples which are very characteristic. The parodist and the caricaturist, to achieve greatness in their *genre*, must have real original genius. Aristophanes shows both here and in many of his choric odes that he has a genuine lyric vein, and that he can rise to heights of great poetic beauty. Inevitably in a ravesty of this sort mannerisms and superficialities are chiefly dealt with, but the grandiloquence which was the bad side of Æschylus' grandeur, his pomp of words degenerating into pomposity, his cloudy mystery of phrase are as accurately hit off as the wire-drawn cleverness of Euripides, his innovations in metaphor, his incoherent emotionalism, the sentimental caterwaulings which he substituted for the manly, simple strains that appealed to musical critics

of the old-fashioned type. Either poet declaims some of his lines into a pair of scales, and Euripides, who is not a verbal heavy-weight, kicks the beam. Finally Æschylus, the declared victor, sets off for the upper world with Dionysus.

A contrast between a play such as we have outlined and a modern revue, for in its loosely-knit texture the " Frogs " may in some respects be compared to a revue, gives the measure of the mental difference between the Athenian and the modern Englishman. Comedy was the people's rare but universal treat. Each year as the Dionysian festival came round there were performances of tragedies and comedies which the people sat through as patiently as those who attend an Eisteddfod. The parallel is close, as prizes were awarded after the rival plays had been performed. A trilogy of tragic plays was performed in the morning and a comedy in the afternoon, and this Gargantuan banquet was celebrated three days running. Those citizens who could not afford the price of admission were in later times given free entrance. We fear that such a literary repast would not attract huge audiences nowadays, and that a disquisition on the merits of two rival poets would cause an exodus in a modern theatre, but Aristophanes emphasises the fact that the audience are keenly interested :—

" Each a book of the words is holding ; never
a single point they'll miss.
Bright their natures, and now, I ween,
Newly whetted, and sharp, and keen.
Dread not any defect of wit.
Battle away without misgiving, sure that the
audience, at least, are fit."

Fit audience but not few.

"The Acharnians"—another of Aristophanes' plays—has a more definite tendency. It is at once a political manifesto, an earnest appeal for peace, a literary travesty, a violent attack upon those who disagreed with Aristophanes' views on politics and the drama, and a vivid picture of contemporary democracy—that renowned democracy of Athens which was the perfect flower of popular government, compared with which most modern democratic systems appear incomplete and illogical. It is impossible to understand the play without some knowledge of its historical background. In 425 B.C., when the play was first performed, Athens was in the throes of the Peloponnesian War, the most celebrated of those internecine wars in which the Greek devoted his wonderful energy to the futile task of slaying brother Greeks, with calamitous results to his civilisation and political freedom. Athens, the brilliant centre of all literature and art, the scene of the most glorious triumphs of the human mind, and the great naval power of Greece, confronted Sparta, the oligarchic military State, whose members gave their whole lives to the profession of war and despised the arts of peace. The strange and inconclusive conflict between whale and elephant—to use Bismarck's image describing a war between a naval and a military Power—had now lasted six years. Athens was not an island, but the Long Walls which she had built at the advice of her great statesman Pericles practically rendered her unassailable by land, and Sparta's power of mischief was limited to an annual invasion of that part of Attica which was not encircled by the Long Walls. When all possible damage had been done to vines and crops, the Spartans retraced their

steps homewards, and the Athenians, embarking on their ships, returned the compliment by landing at various points and harrying the territories of Sparta's luckless allies. The struggle appeared interminable, and a Peace Party, small in numbers but supported by many high-born Athenians, and aided by the genius of Aristophanes, enunciated on suitable occasions " Stop-the-War " views.

Dicæopolis, the exponent of this policy in " The Acharnians," is a typical elderly Athenian farmer, tired of the restraints of Athens, where he has been cooped so long, and anxious for peace. We find him in the place of assembly waiting for the citizens to arrive and for business to begin. He has come " prepared to riot, wrangle, interrupt the speakers, whene'er they talk of anything but peace," and we know that meetings of this turbulent democracy could be very lively. At length the Prytanes, the Presidents, appear, very late, and a start is made. Some envoys have been to the " Great King," the King of Persia, and they make their report. Dicæopolis, who has pronounced views as to the payment of envoys out of the public purse, continually interrupts. The envoys profess to have brought a Persian with them, " The King's eye." Dicæopolis is indignant at the sham ; but ,in spite of all, the " King's eye " is invited to dine with the Prytanes. A Thracian chieftain volunteers help, but the lavish rate of pay suggested makes Dicæopolis groan. Finally Dicæopolis resolves to conclude a special private peace with the Spartans by the aid of Amphitheus, who brings him three sample bottles of peace. The first is a five years' brand, and is rejected with disgust because it smells of tar and naval preparations. The ten years' sample is not much better. The thirty years' brand, however, is accepted with enthusiasm. Dicæopolis goes to his house in the country and prepares to celebrate the rural festival in honour of the god Dionysus.

But the people of Acharnæ, a deme or village in Attica whose inhabitants occupied themselves with the manufacture of charcoal, have got wind of his intentions. The Acharnians are described as " stout hearts-of-oak " and the devastation of their lands by the Spartans has only embittered them. They pelt Dicæopolis with stone, and threaten excitedly to slay him. At last in desperation he vows that he will slay something that they greatly prize, and fetches out a hamper full of charcoal whose existence he purposes to terminate, a parody of a famous tragic scene. He is granted a hearing and goes to Euripides, the tragic poet, who was noted for his habit of bringing heroes in rags and tatters upon the stage in order to excite pity. Euripides is hard at work, but is wheeled out, still busy at his manuscript. Some suitable garments from Euripides' wardrobe of properties are brought, and after an amusing dialogue Dicæopolis is just going when he bethinks himself that he needs " a little tankard with a broken rim." Euripides accommodates him, and Dicæopolis is grateful, though the former thinks that after this lavish generosity he might as well shut up shop. But Dicæopolis has forgotten the thing on which his whole success depends. He must have some chervil from Euripides, whose mother, as his detractors averred, had been a greengrocer. Euripides retires indignantly, and Dicæopolis proceeds chervil-less to his ordeal.

His speech is the central passage of the play. The war, he says, is not entirely the fault of the Spartans, but is partly due to the worthless gang of informers, parasites who batten on democracy. He gives a scandalous account of the origin of the war, insinuating that the great Pericles, " the Olympian," thundered and lightened and confounded Hellas

merely because two of Aspasia's handmaids had been abducted. The Chorus of Acharnians listen with mixed feelings. Half are won over, and the defeated section call to the General Lamachus for help. Lamachus is a " Bombastes Furioso," a Pistol who speaks " in Ercles' vein," but in spite of Aristophanes' delineations of him he was an able general who died a soldier's death in Sicily. Dicæopolis jeers at him for taking public money and mocks his continual refrain " the people's will." Finally the general retires discomfited, and Dicæopolis establishes a market where anyone, Spartan, Megarian, or Bœotian, may buy, informers alone excepted

His first visitor is a Megarian, a man who, ruined by the war and reduced to the direst straits, brings his two little girls to sell disguised as pigs. In the broadest of dialects he threatens that if they do not squeal loudly enough he will—terrible prospect—take them home again. There is an amusing scene between the Megarian and Dicæopolis, who penetrates the disguise of the little girls but agrees to buy them, giving in return some garlic and salt. There next appears a Bœotian, whose approach is heralded by some pipers. Their discordant efforts bring Dicæopolis out in a rage. He relents when he finds that the Bœotian has a varied assortment of wares—mats, herbs, lamp wicks, birds, and even an eel from Lake Copais ! He accepts these ecstatically, but the harmony is disturbed by the entrance of an informer, a class who seem to have been as unpopular as the modern inspector. This gentleman objects to the lamp wick as contraband, and proves elaborately that it might set fire to the arsenal. However he is quickly gagged and packed off with the Bœotian, who hopes to make a fortune by exhibiting this queer animal. The play ends with another scene between Lamachus and Dicæopolis. The former has just been summoned to military duty in the mountain snow, but Dicæopolis jeers at all his preparations, and to plague him starts cooking the dainties which he has just purchased. The spectators are given an actual demonstration—one might say a cookery demonstration—of the material benefits which a restoration of peace will bring in its train.

Merely to hint that such a play in modern times would have been slain before it birth by the Defence of the Realm Act, and that its author would have suffered ruin is to indicate how far we have progressed in the paths of freedom since then. But Aristophanes was no anti-patriot, he was merely a stout party man and a good hater, who realised that in 425 B.C., the war between Athens and Sparta was a drawn game, as it would have continued to be indefinitely but for the frenzied Sicilian adventure. Even a deadly contest between Dorian and Ionian would not prevail upon an Athenian to give up his time-honoured franchises, above all his Παρρησία, freedom of speech, or to dispense with his annual festivals. The Fourth Century Athenian, a man of weaker fibre, found the strong meat of Old Comedy too much for his queasy stomach, not so the sons of the men of Marathon. It is as extraordinary a proof of Athenian liberties as we could desire. But for those who found their views unscrupulously travestied like Socrates, for those who were mercilessly ridiculed like Pauson, the starving painter of animals, Lysistratus the fasting man, or that " knavish bathman the little baboon Cleigenes,' Comedy must have had another aspect. The Decalogue of the Dionysia was a very slight affair and it certainly did not include the hest " Thou shalt not bear false witness." Holiday time has always claimed its license and perhaps a jest was not taken too literally. There are some

practical jokers whom one can forgive to seventy times seven, and Aristophanes, it may be, was one of these. At any rate we find Plato, who doubtless indignantly resented the misrepresentation of " The Clouds," honouring in his " Banquet " the slanderer with a prominent place. The ponderer, the " walker in the heavens " (sky-pilot shall we say ?) discourses over the bottle with the genial, charming obscurantist. Perhaps it was so with others. Just as the immortal Mr. Pickwick on his chaise journey from Bristol to Birmingham found it impossible to be angry with Mr. Bob Sawyer and Mr. Allen, especially when they handed the toddy round, so too much was forgiven to the Old Athenian who was such a *bon vivant*. And besides he was almost impartial. One day it might be the leather-seller Cleon, or the lampmaker Hyperbolus, another day Lamachus, but the dandy, the fat man, the thin man, the prodigal, the " waster," the advanced poet, the theorist, the Woman's Rights people, they would all get their turn. There would be at the next Dionysia, the usual politics (not to be taken too seriously), the usual jokes at persons, the usual racy allusions, the usual review of all things and sundry, the usual flashes of delightful poetry. Let the jester have his fling, and let us rejoice in the richness of the fare.

And indeed it is this many-sidedness that is Aristophanes' greatest charm. He was a patriot with many limitations, despite his genius. He abhorred Euripides, who was not the poet of the age, but, perhaps still better, the poet of the future, and who, like all pioneers, was abused and flouted. He travestied the teaching of Socrates, another of the great dynamic influences in the history of human thought, he attacked the policy of Pericles, Athens' greatest statesman, root and branch. Yet later ages which have not accepted his views have laughed at his jokes, and admired his poetry, and those who wish to understand the tendencies of the age of Euripides and of Socrates must read first their Plato and their Euripides, but they must also con their Aristophanes. This crusted Tory who opposed everything that had not the sanction of antiquity was a true product of the democracy which he alternately bantered or denounced. If democracy involves freedom of speech, those who hold with Messrs. Chesterton and Belloc that freedom of speech does not exist may well look back with sighing glances to the age of the grand old exemplar of Athens' " Old Comedy," the Comedy which libelled its opponents and " ragged " its hearers, which called a spade a spade and a villain a villain.

THE MEDEA

1914

Poetry was once described by Arnold in a much controverted phrase as " criticism of life." To no literary form is the definition more aptly suited than to Tragedy ; to the Tragedy of no nation can it be more fitly applied than to Greek Tragedy. Originally a narration of the wanderings and tribulation of Dionysus—so at any rate the earlier historians explained it—Tragedy at Athens was at once a religious rite and a forum in which the pros and cons of some moral problem might be argued. The Athenian, immune from the daily burden and delight of an energetic press and " able editors," revelled in a dramatic presentation by his favourite playwright of the burning questions of the day. Parts of some Greek plays—it is no condemnation to say so—read like an inspired leading article, parts, we are free to confess, especially of the weaker plays of Euripides, read like an uninspired leading article. The reader of a sublime play of Æschylus is surprised to find it suddenly merging into a eulogy of the Areopagus. Imagine an English play of 1909, a time of political controversy, ending in a panegyric of the House of Lords, and you have a fair parallel. On the other hand the problems of human destiny with their perennial interest have never found more exquisite expression than in Greek Tragedy, and the choric ode of Sophocles which declares " not to be born is best, next best to return with all speed whence we came " has found a pathetic echo in many a sore-tried soul long after.* The Athenian drama therefore held up the mirror to life in more senses than one. The progression from Æschylus to Sophocles, and from Sophocles to Euripides, the third great tragic poet, is significant of the startling leap forward made by the Athenian mind in little more than a half century. First in order comes Æschylus—first in greatness as some judge—profoundly reverent, sublimely imaginative, opulent in metaphor, ponderously oracular, cloudily obscure. In Sophocles, who, as Arnold truly says, " saw life steadily and saw it whole," we have the fittest representative of the Athenian mind with its restraint, its sense of measure, its perfect poise, its complete synthesis of form and content, the tragedian who, to us at any rate, seems to give the most unfailing delight by the very equability of his greatness, but who, through his very perfection, has failed to win the enthusiastic regard which many have felt for his predecessor or for his successor. And finally there is Euripides, described by Elizabeth Barrett Browning in a phrase too suggestive of a faultily-plumbed bath tap as " Euripides the human with his droppings of warm tears."† more adequately characterised by Aristotle as τραγικώτατος, (most tragic), more summarily by Swinburne as a " botcher," the tragedian of the critical spirit to whom no myth is sacred, no tradition venerable, a writer

* Compare the evidence given at the inquest upon Baron de Reuter, April, 1915. In his last letter the Baron quoted these very words.

† Our Euripides, the human,
With his droppings of warm tears,
And his touches of things common
Till they rose to touch the spheres.

Robert Browning prefixes these lines as a motto to Balaustion's Adventure.

who was bitterly assailed by his own generation for the very qualities which secured him the admiration of posterity, a writer who refuses to allow his readers to sink into the comfortable slumbers of complacent optimism, but plagues them with problems difficult to unravel and unpleasant in their solution, waging a truceless war against every convention, destroying creeds and institutions with a corroding scepticism. Him, it would seem, you must either laud to the skies or consign to the nethermost pit.

He has been fortunate in our generation in the admiration and enthusiastic study of Dr. Verrall of Cambridge and Professor Gilbert Murray of Oxford. Of Murray's insight into Euripides, of the poetic gifts which make his translation not a translation but an independent creation, the Medea is an excellent example. One word of warning only is required. Murray refuses to wear the shackles of a pedantic literalism, and gives us at times not Euripides but Euripides romanticised, Euripides as he might have written in the twentieth century A.D. But our debt to Murray is not small, not only for his masterly renderings of the text of a poet of whose spirit he has imbibed not a small portion, but also for a series of introductory essays full of touches of profound insight beautifully expressed. The services of Verrall may seem more questionable. Verrall is, or rather alas! was, a scholar more brilliant than sound, one of that rare band of Classical students who would have been as much at home in fifth century Athens as in their own College common-rooms, an amazingly clever man who by some happy chance wrote Euripidean commentaries rather than Meredithian novels, an investigator with all the acumen and analytic power of a Sherlock Holmes, who had the vivid exposition and more than the vivid exposition of Sherlock Holmes' creator, a man in short of supreme and consummate *wit* (the French *esprit*), who defined wit as " the subtle manipulation of meanings," and exemplified his own definition, one whose very acuteness involved him in errors into which that safe and platitudinous dullness which so often assumes the guise of wisdom could never fall. In " Euripides the Rationalist " and in other writings he has enunciated the theory that Euripides' plays are a series of attacks upon those myths which an Athenian dramatist must necessarily take for his subject-matter, and that these attacks being expressed by innuendo and equivoque passed unnoticed by the general but were " vocal to the prudent," in other words to the good Euripidean, and that thus may we explain the faults of construction which men like Swinburne have so furiously denounced. Unfair though the comparison may be to Verrall, Verrallism has been scarcely more successful than Baconism, yet it is certain that all those who have since studied Euripides with any care have been permeated by the Verrall spirit. As in metaphysics the process is everything, the actual tangible result nothing, so with Verrall it is the method and the point of view which are of priceless value. What both Verrall and Murray have taught by precept and by example is that what Euripides meant, what message he had to deliver *do* matter, nay are of vital import, and that any scholarship worthy the name must consider not only how a great writer expresses himself but also what he has to express.

Whatever may be the merits, generally speaking, of the Verrallian method, Mr. Sherlock Holmes can find little to do in the Medea. It is a one-character play with a heroine who has a devil. Fiercely passionate, barbarously ruthless, savage and sentimental, dissembler and Fury by turns, she is a conception that would require a Rachel

for an adequate impersonation. If the play is one of Euripides' earliest, we see how soon he shook himself free, as far as he could, of the gods and their adventures, and turned his eyes towards the troubles of humanity. The Agamemnon of Æschylus deals, too, with the wrongs of an outraged wife, but now different the treatment!

The theme is very simple, and very modern. It is a "tragedy" in the Sunday newspaper sense, a tragedy such as those vehicles of enlightenment serve up smoking hot to their patrons at weekly intervals. A woman forms a liaison with a man, lives with him some years, bears him children. The man grows weary of "roses and raptures," sees the prospect of a brilliant match, and breaks the news to his mistress. Vengeful at first, she masks her fury later, is thereby able to destroy both bride and father, and then, in savage crowning of her vengeance, slaughters her own two children to spite her recreant lover. Finally having secured herself a safe retreat, she withdraws to a country with which no treaty of extradition exists.

The interest of the play centres round Medea's character as it is revealed in various situations, and as it is illuminated by contrast with other characters. The play is a problem play. It puts the old new question of woman, her status, her rights and wrongs, the results of passion lawful or illicit. Euripides has been called a misogynist. Few, however, have presented with more force the woman's case, though he glimpses at the other side also. Like a true artist, he suggests no sham solution of a riddle of sphinx-like subtlety.

Of the mass of legend relating to the gods and heroes upon which the tragedians were dependent for their subject-matter, Euripides has here chosen the most romantic of all,* the legend of the Argonauts, who sought the golden fleece in far-distant Colchis. Yet, as Murray points out, he prefers to leave out all the romance and concentrates upon realities. Euripides, or perhaps an earlier poet Neophron, added much to the potentialities of the legend by making Medea the murderess of her children. By this free handling of the myth he was able to construct a drama throbbing with life, palpitating with modernity. The characters are not ideal but painfully real. It is life in its stark reality, stern and sordid, life not limned in all the hues of romance, but portrayed in the hour when the flames of passion have burnt themselves out and only the ashes are left, the hour when the harvest is over and only the aftermath of fury and revenge remains for the gleaners.

The technique of the play seems perfect, the action starts with the very first note. Eschewing the divine prologiser who rouses Swinburne to proper fury, the dramatist introduces a nurse, who, plunging *in medias res* and making only a few bare but apt allusions to the past, laments Medea's present case. The children then enter with their attendant, a skilful arrangement. He tells the news. A marriage is a-foot, between Jason and the daughter of Creon ruler of Corinth. The hearers are strung to the highest pitch by a cry from within—Medea bewailing her woes and refusing to be comforted. A chorus of Corinthian women attracted by her cry now appears and urges the nurse to lead Medea forth. Medea appears, makes the women her confidantes, and denounces the disadvantages, for a woman, of the married state. But she is interrupted by the entry of Creon, who is one of those who make a cult of harshness. He brutally hails Medea, and demands

* See Murray's Introduction to "Medea."

her instant departure from his dominions. She is pleading and tearful. How often in real life must the women cringe, weep, and lie! She gains from Creon, who is astonished at his own generosity, a respite of one day. The future victim of Medea's fell design plumes himself upon his clemency, and the irony is complete. "Mine is no tyrant's mood." True. The genuine tyrant knows that half-measures in tyranny are usually fatal. Creon withdraws, and then Medea in a speech of splendid force bursts out in a raging invective. She has not played the suppliant for nothing. Now will she consider the best method of revenge.

So ends what we might call Act I. It is separated from the next "episode" by a choric ode. Euripides' odes have sometimes been criticised as irrelevant and injurious to the action, but such criticisms lose their force here. All plays—nay, all literature and all art—need relief and contrast. We cannot keep pace with the dramatist, we need some rest by the way. Modern drama leaves a mere gap to be filled with *entr'actes* to which no one listens. The ancients, far more artistic, filled these gaps with the comments of the chorus the "ideal spectator," Every Greek dramatist has achieved masterpieces of perfect simplicity and perfect art which make all but the finest English odes seem by comparison mere frigidity or fustian. In no play are the choric odes more effective than in the Medea. They sum up in the language of exquisite poetry the feelings which the preceding scene might excite in a thoughtful listener, they express such a listener's comments better than he or she—for they are women—could express them. The contrast of metre, the substitution of a chant for declamation, the difference of dialect, which Verrall well compares to an extra manual on an organ, the lyric quality of the ode itself, all is wrought into a creation whose beauty it is impossible either to describe or to exaggerate.

After Creon, Jason. He knows by anticipation what Medea will say, mocks and jeers at her, bidding her rail on at her pleasure. Being of a highly generous disposition, he is willing to make fitting provision for her and for the children. Medea bursts into a recital of her good deeds, her sacrifices, her sins on Jason's behalf. The latter in reply, answering her point by point, makes that debating speech, for which the Athenians seemed to have so keen a relish. After bitter interchanges he withdraws with Medea's curse upon him. The Chorus pray in a beautiful ode that strong-willed and transitory love may never be theirs, but rather "the rare sweet beat of bosoms without war, that love, and hate not."

Ægeus the king of Athens now appears en route for Troezen. His married life has been overshadowed by the gloom of childlessness. Medea promises him the fulfilment of his desire for an heir and in return obtains a refuge in Athens. In some degree the criticism that the scene is not essential is true, but it is a peaceful interlude between scenes of very high tension, and of course it flattered Athenian vanity. Then in an invocation "magnificent in its dramatic effect" Medea revels her dark purpose and sends the nurse to fetch Jason, what time the Chorus by a famous eulogy of Athens "the pitiful" hint that she too should show pity. The action of the play is not carried forward perhaps, but nothing could be in more exquisite or in subtler harmony.

Medea is now prudent and well-advised. With consummate skill she reproduces Jason's former admonitions. She has aptly learnt her lesson, and begs of him only that

her children may be spared the misery of exile. A sudden wave of pity sweeps over her as she beholds her children, pity for the fate to which she dooms them, a fate veiled by phrases such as tragic irony loved to indulge in. She will send gifts to Creon's daughter, a bait which ensures her destruction. The children take the gifts " fine robings and a carcanet of gold," which must be delivered to none but the bride. The Chorus despairingly accept the children's fate, and foretell in striking language the young bride's death.

Speedily the attendant returns with happy tidings. Medea receives it with a shriek. Her resolution is almost overborne, and we are given a wonderful picture of the mentality of a murderess. " Between the acting of a dreadful thing and the first motion, all the interim is like a phantasma or a hideous dream. The genius and the mortal instruments are then in council," and the dread spectacle is unfolded by the most tragic of the Greeks with marvellous power. Medea passionately embraces her children,*

" Oh, darling hand ! Oh, darling mouth and eye,
And royal mien, and bright brave faces clear,
May you be blessed, but not here ! What here
Was yours your father stole . . . . . Ah God, the glow
Of cheek on cheek, the tender touch ; and Oh,
Sweet scent of childhood . . . . Go ! Go ! Am I blind ? . . .
Mine eyes can see not, when I look to find
Their places. I am broken by the wings
Of evil . . . . . Yea I know to what bad things
I go, but louder than all thought doth cry
Anger, which maketh man's worst misery."

And then when our feelings are most harrowed, at the moment of the utmost tension, we have, not a curtain falling for chocolates and conversation, but a tender strain of softest music from the Chorus, a musing on a question which the Greek put often to himself even from the time of Solon, as one of the most exquisite of Herodotus' stories tells us, put to himself more often doubtless in the agonising years of the Peloponnesian war,† Is fatherhood a blessing ?

" And thus my thought would speak ; that she
Who ne'er hath borne a child nor known
Is nearer to felicity :
Unlit she goeth and alone,
With little understanding what
A child's touch means of joy or woe
And many toils she beareth not.
But they within whose garden fair
That gentle plant hath blown, they go
Deep-written all their days with care—
To rear the children, to make fast
Their hold, to win them wealth ; and then
Much darkness, if the seed at last
Bear fruit in good or evil men !
And one thing at the end of all

* The extracts quoted are all taken from Prof. Murray's translation.

† The date of the play is given as 431 B.C.

Abideth, that which all men dread :
The wealth is won, the limbs are bred
To manhood, and the heart withal
Honest ; and lo, where Fortune smiled,
Some change, and what hath fallen ? Hark !
'Tis death slow winging to the dark,
And in his arms what was thy child,"*

But the calm of perfect poesy cannot endure. To Medea " Straining her senses in a hot surmise " comes a messenger who bids her flee. " The maiden princess lieth—and her sire the King—both murdered by thy poison-fire." Medea exults in the tidings.

" How died they ? Hath it been a very foul
Death, prithee ? That were comfort to my soul."

We have next another peculiarity of the Greek tragedy, a messenger's speech. It is as usual with Euripides a narrative of masterly brilliance, and tells of the horrible death wrought upon her victims by Medea's enchantments. The murderess lingers on the scene but a moment to string herself to the highest pitch. Natural feeling to-morrow, revenge to-day. A cry is then heard within. Vainly the women beat at the barred door and the dread deed is enacted. Jason, surmising what will happen, arrives too late to save his children. He bids his servants burst the doors open, but Medea, transformed into a living curse, a devil *ex machina*, appears upon the roof in a chariot of winged dragons which are to bear her to Athens. Jason bitterly curses her, she mockingly replies. The painful scene continues till the enchantress slowly rises in her chariot and speeds on her way, refusing Jason the last privilege of burying his children.

* * * * * * * * * *

And is this the end of it all ? Alas ! in real life it too often is. Sentiment yields to passion, passion to possession, possession to satiety, satiety to revulsion, and revulsion to the revolver or the phial of vitriol, and the cycle is complete. " Aye me ! the course of true love never did run smooth," and the course of its many counterfeits is still less easy. And so though music may never end upon a discord, drama which holds the mirror up to life must sometimes spurn the insipidity of the happy ending, and it is right that Medea should soar away into the empyrean after the sordid recrimination which is the the last chapter of so many a love-story. If life is a discord which knows no resolution—and it sometimes is, the poet seems to say—the dramatist must not pretend to solve a problem which no human thought can solve. He is no *deus ex machina*.

Thus the Medea poses questions which are of abiding interest. What is woman's rightful position in society ? That is the thought which suggests itself again and again in the play, is the problem which has a perpetual fascination for the women of Corinth who constitute the Chorus. Man has rounded Seraglio Point but not doubled Cape Turk, said Meredith in a celebrated epigram. The Greek woman was in a state of moral and intellectual nonage, confined to the γυναικεῖον, forbidden to range abroad, admonished even by a Pericles that that woman was the best whose reputation either for good or for evil was the least, enchained within the limits of a " slave morality," the necessary means

* These lines have an added poignancy for us, at the end of a war more terrible and more harrowing than the Peloponnesian War.

of the propagation of the species, the toy of men's lighter hours, but little more. Medea defies and rebels against the " man-made conventions " of a stronger sex. Marriage is woman's one vocation. How cruel a vocation, and yet not to be married is a more dismal fate. The father having amassed a liberal dowry, the hoard perhaps of many years, delivers his daughter to her husband, and the bride finds herself the subject of one who is lord of her body. " They talk of their deeds of bravery in the battle line, but I would rather fight thrice in deadliest combat than bear one child. Let women be given the opportunity of setting forth their case, and with what different hues will women and her lord be delineated." Such is the view expressed by the Chorus, and the play, like many other Greek plays, without its choric odes would be not merely cruelly maimed but technically incomplete, a problem only partially set out. Love was then as now woman's all, but for man, the political animal, the wordling, merely a πάρεργον, a word which has the connotation of a secondary matter, a pastime, even a hobby. Only a spurious sentiment would deny this, and there is little sentiment of any sort in Greek literature.

The importance of Medea's Oriental birth should not be exaggerated. There is the Medea and the Madonna in every woman, and one of the most striking passages in the play illustrates it, that passage, censured by shallow critics, in which her dual personality reveals itself. Yet the fact that Medea was no Greek, that her passions and her crimes were on a larger scale, undoubtedly helped Euripides. Her capacity for either love or hate far outruns the capacity of the ordinary woman. She can be either devil or sublime heroine. She sacrifices everything for Jason—home, parents, conscience, all—but it is " a passion of a rank growth " predestined to a fateful issue. Euripides seized with delight the opportunity afforded him to shake off the trammels of convention and to portray a murderess but a real woman, a woman who might shock the conventionists, persons who prefer to shirk unpleasant realities and to think in blinkers, but a creation which would thrill and enthrall readers in all succeeding ages. She chose her mate at her own pleasure, she did not submit herself at her parents' dictate to whatever husband she was bidden to honour and obey, she flung scruple to the winds, " all for love, and the world well lost." But when one who loves not wisely but too well is mated with a partner who loves wisely and *not* too well, in the absence of the steadying influence of some permanent bond, love sinks and dies away. The interplay of Jason's and Medea's characters is most striking in this, that Jason is all politician, Medea, as he often taunts her, all lover. Jason seems to have been a lover of the Augustan type, one who like Augustus prosecuted his amours for some deep end of policy. He made love to Medea, not smitten at first sight, not overpowered by her beauty, her passion, her devotion, but as policy's last resort. If a career is everything, his contention is unanswerable, and his first marriage or liaison of convenience must give place to another. Medea has served him well, and shall retire with a competence, the boys shall be assured a brilliant future. But Medea's blood runs too swiftly for a cold schemer, and such proposals are spurned with scorn and fury. Medea will *not* be discarded, flung aside like a toy, revenge she will have even if she slaughters Jason's children, who incidentally are her own. It is an extraordinary development of the germ in the original legend. No wonder that to those who took their morals and their myths on trust Euripides was a purveyor of debased morality who made the young cultivate that highly dangerous activity—thought. Such purblind

critics may have shown their usual folly in resisting the inevitable, but with unerring instinct they discerned the explosive force of a treatment of received traditions which would shatter into annihilation the ancient piety.

Medea then is an incarnation of the view that refuses to regard woman as a chattel and her love as a gift to be cast carelessly away when it is no longer prized. The crime of passion, as our Gallic neighbours call it, occurs too frequently, the bombs and hammers of certain feminists have sounded too often in our ears, for us to need the lesson so urgently as the Athens of the fifth century B.C., but one who turns up his Richardson will find plenty to prove that other views still flourished a century and a half ago. But what a character to put before an Athenian audience, or to commend to an Athenian woman! We cannot wonder that this marvellous play gained a mere third prize. The consummate technique, the unerring touch—we feel with a thrill of delight in the first line that the master is inspired, no " botching " here—everything that makes the play to us the most effective, the most " tragic " of Greek plays, could only heighten its unpleasantness for the Athens of 431 B.C. And indeed great as the play is, it is *not* a pleasant play. It does *not* effect the purgation of the emotions with fear and pity, it does *not* leave us with the resigned tender melancholy of some great tragedies, it *does* end on a discord. Euripides, one thinks, in this mood, would have smiled sardonically at the termination of Ibsen's Brand, where the idealist who has failed, as the avalanche descends which is to engulf him, is assured as though mockingly by a voice through the thunder that " God is Love." The dramatist who sees no solution of the problem may be justified in his austere refusal, not of a happy ending but of a harmony which is no harmony, but if he pleases the stalls, he never will please the gallery. Humanity, clinging desperately to the faith that life is not " a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing," following an elemental instinct, will claim and crave its final concord. At the close of the play the reader, like Professor Murray, finds himself " longing for some one to speak a word of explanation or forgiveness, or at least leave some sound of music on our ears to drown that dreadful and insistent clamour of hate. The truth is that in this play Medea herself is the *dea ex machina*. The woman whom Jason and Creon intended simply to crush has been transformed by her injuries from an individual human being into a sort of living Curse. She is inspired with superhuman force. Her wrongs and her hate fill all the sky. And the judgment pronounced on Jason comes not from any disinterested or peace-making God, but from his own victim transfigured into a devil."

" From any such judgment there is an instant appeal to sane human sympathy. Jason has suffered more than enough. But that also is the way of the world. And the last word upon these tragic things is most often something not to be expressed by the sentences of even the wisest articulate judge, but only by the unspoken *lacrimæ rerum*."*

* The quotation comes from the end of the introduction to Professor Murray's translation of the play.

IBSEN*

1917

Real literary criticism is almost the hardest thing in the world. Criticism even of accepted and time-honoured classics, much more of new and unknown pretenders to the laurel crown, is a task that borders on creation. Passing from the region of courteous appreciation, or the superlatives which mean nothing, to the realm of exact appraisement, we realise at once how difficult it is with momentary glance to distinguish the passing vogue from the enduring preciousness of a κτῆμα ἐς ἀεί. The new men have many handicaps. It has been said that " the greatest works grow in importance, as trees do after the death of the mortal men who planted them." Virgil for instance is richer for us by near two thousand years of loving regard and clustering associations. And to cloud men's judgment there are the idols of the market place, idols of the cave, idols of the critic's armchair, all apt to deceive even the very elect. It is in truth difficult to place great writers. Yet we plead guilty to a desire to test and measure the indiscriminate laudation which contemporary writers sometimes win from others besides their advertising agents, and we have some sympathy with that dramatic critic of *The Times* who used, despite impatient Philistines and theatre managers foaming at the mouth, to fortify his damnations of the *dernier cris* by lavish quoting of Aristotle. Our rulers may be small but they will suffice to measure off quite a number of the " best sellers." Surely if either our admiration or our censure is to be intelligent, we must seek to get to principles of general validity, to see all things *sub specie quadam æternitatis*, in the light of eternity. We must contrast and compare the writers of our day with the writers of acknowledged greatness who have endured the idolatry of innumerable eulogists, the assaults of countless polemists and detractors, the wrackful siege of battering days, the wear and tear of centuries. In literature as in theology, the principle *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*, must have its force.

The narrow seas which have baffled the designs of a Napoleon, a Kaiser Wilhelm, and other would-be invaders of our island kingdom, have proved an impassable barrier to ideas also. We must plead guilty to Matthew Arnold's indictment ; we *are* provincials and not good Europeans. We have admired our precious jewel " set in the silver sea which serves us in the office of a wall, or as a moat defensive to a house " and ourselves, its possessors and its prisoners, we have viewed with an egregious satisfaction our constitution, our ideals,—when we provided ourselves with such luxuries—and our modes of thought, we have thanked Heaven for the fortress built by nature for itself against infection—" of ideas " and the hand of " intellectual war,"—and from the portcullis of our island fastness we have held scornful parle with those without. Like the later Greeks we admire our own productions too insistently and too exclusively, and we forget that our large parcel of the realms of gold is still but the part of a greater whole. Not the least of the claims to our regard that the Greek and Roman classics have upon us

* In this essay Ibsen the satirist and the destructive critic is considered rather than the Ibsen of the last period, the symbolist. I consider that these latter plays do not represent the truest Ibsen, and are not his most typical, or most effective, work.

is that they have redeemed us from the reproach of complete insularity, that Homer and Virgil and Plato and Cicero have made us free of a great intellectual commonwealth, that Horace's shrewd worldly wisdom has pierced the joints in the armour of many a good Philistine, that Greece and Rome have in short transformed us from provincials into members of a great world empire. But if we pass from antiquity to modern literature we find more often than we care to confess dissimilarity and antipathy. The Reformation and Puritanism here, the French Revolution there, have left wide gulfs, gulfs to be expressed rather in thousands of leagues than in a single score of miles. True the ripe wisdom, the easy good nature of matured experience such as we find in Montaigne must charm all hearts, the lambent humour and profound knowledge of humanity of a Molière will win enthusiastic admiration, but to a trueborn Englishman Corneille is merely frigid, Chateaubriand a turgid mystic posing for applause, Victor Hugo a stagey posturer with only moments of fine poetry, "Wilhelm Meister" a concoction alternately nasty or merely vapid, "Faust" a fantastic cloudy rigmarole with a good deal of genius hidden away in its vast corners, "disjecti membra poetæ," while as for the characters of the much belauded Dostoieffsky, they behave like Russian revolutionaries. We have condescended at times to lead the Continent—notably with a noble reprobate who made England too hot to hold him, and perforce solaced himself with the admiration of Goethe as some compensation for the objurgations of Southey, Gifford, and " my grandmother's review, the British "—but we have never cared whether or not we were floating down the main stream of European culture.

When therefore we are told that Norway has produced a genius, who has created one poem which may be compared with "Faust," another which is in the same class as "Don Quixote," a poet who has a power of writing short, thrilling, and haunting lyrics which put him beside Heine, and who in a series of prose dramas has almost created, and certainly perfected, a new *genre* and a new *technique*, we are rightly sceptical, but we do well to look and see. Of that restless, analytic spirit which has been slowly sapping many of the accepted creeds, conventions, and ideals of a civilisation which was " living on nothing but the crumbs from the revolution table of the last century," Ibsen is perhaps the most gifted and the most prominent exponent. In this respect like Euripides he has probed and examined, and poured scorn on most accepted views, though like the Athenian he has for the most part left theology alone. A great lyricist with a wonderful power of expressing the poignant in language of the barest simplicity, he forsook poetry lest its romance should cause him to swerve from his self-imposed mission of exposing realities.

> " What is life ? A fighting
> In heart and in brain with toils.
> Poetry ? That means writing
> Domesday accounts of our souls."

That is one of Ibsen's most characteristic utterances. Life is a strange struggle between men and the trolls, those queer conceptions of Norwegian mythology who bring to nought the fine schemes of Peer Gynt and all others of the race of men. And Poetry, or at any rate Ibsen's drama, is certainly nothing else than an opening of the book of judgment in which are remorsely set down, by a recording angel who never sheds a tear, all the failings, faults, and vices of mankind. There is some inexplicable thwarting

influence at work which loves to work sadness instead of joy. Sometimes the tragedy involves a bee and a greenling hip, sometimes it is something bigger. But in any case the sorrows of the bee and the apple-blossom are merely an allegory of what Mr. Hardy would call " Life's little Ironies."

Some poets sing for the mere joy of singing, some are " cradled into poetry by wrong and learn in suffering what they teach in song." There is no doubt as to the *causa causans* in Ibsen's case. Life used him hardly in his early years and he was the victim and the instrument of that same *saeva indignatio* which inspired in Swift a disinterested horror at the viciousness or folly of his fellow creatures, and which led him to scourge them so unmercifully. It is the poignant cruelty of things which agonises him, which touches him on the raw, and wrings from him bitter cries of anguish. Here is a poem of wondrous, painful power, which tells us of a soul into which the iron has entered.

THE POWER OF MEMORY.

Do you know how a trainer teaches his bear
A lesson time can never impair ?

In a brewer's copper he ties him tight,
And under it sets the fire alight.

Then comes the lesson ; without a word he
Plays the *Joy of Life* on a hurdy-gurdy.

The bear, half daft as the heat advances,
Finds he cannot stand, so perforce he dances.

That tune henceforth if you but begin to him,
Straight enters a dancing devil into him.

I too had once a taste of the copper,
With Orchestra and a fire all proper,

And burned a trifle more than my fingers ;
Still lively the recollection lingers.

So let of that day an echo sound,
On a glowing grid I seem to be bound.

As the quick of the nail to a stab must answer,
I find my verse-feet and straight turn dancer.

Another poem of a most " forlorn beauty " tell us yet again of the cruelty of things

THE EIDER-DUCK.

The eider's home is in Norway ;
He dwells by the fiord that is leaden grey,

He plucks the soft, soft down from his breast,
And warm and cosy he builds his nest.

But the cruel fisherman does not spare,
He plunders the nest till all is bare.

The fisher is hard, but the bird holds true ;
He strips his own warm bosom anew ;

And robbed once more, he will yet make rich
Once his nest in a secret niche.

But steal this treasure, his third, his last—
One night he spreads his wings to the blast;
With bleeding bosom the sea-fog dun
He cleaves, to the South, to the South and the Sun.*

All these poems, like all real poetry, are based upon personal experience, refined and transmuted no doubt, but on something that the writer had lived in and through. His poetry and his dramas are temperamental reactions with life and its hard facts.

Ibsen's biography is the key to much of his writings. Henrik Ibsen was born in 1828 at Skien, of very middle-class ancestry. His forbears had been a seafaring stock and his father—Jon Gynt as we may term him—was well to do and careless. When his thriftlessness led to a financial collapse, an era of dire poverty ensued. The boy was apprenticed to an apothecary at Grimstad, a little seaport. There he remained for seven years, so fearfully poor that he trained himself first to do without an overcoat, then to do without stockings, and then to dispense with underclothing, in a Norwegian winter. He did not love Grimstad, "the little narrow-minded borough with its ridiculous officials, its pinched and hypocritical social order, its intolerable law and orderliness,"† and he took his full revenge. Time and again does the town appear in his plays, idealised and seen through the mist of the memory, but still the very town where the poor, proud druggist's apprentice had frayed ipecacuanha, failed to pass his qualifying examination, and made himself disliked by the young ladies because he was so "spectral." Aided by a friend a trifle richer than himself, he got to Christiania, and was appointed dramatic poet at the theatre there, a *Johannes factotum*. His privations continued for several years, but in 1863 the tide began to turn. He was given a royal pension of £90 per annum, with which largesse, like the bird of bleeding bosom, he fared to the South and the Sun. Rome and Italian warmth soon revived him, and in 1865 he brought out "Brand," the most striking dramatic achievement of modern times. Two years later followed his other big work, "Peer Gynt," a dramatic poem not a drama, a work which in its richness of symbolic content, in its fantastic humour, and wide discursiveness recalls Goethe's "Faust." So far Ibsen had displayed rare and unquestionable poetic gifts, a power of vigorous, free, and absolutely spontaneous expression which seemed quite unhampered by the exigencies of rhyme, and a scarce equalled pathos of lyrical expression. All this he now gave up. Lest the hues of poetry should befog his work, he confined himself to stern prose. His succession of dramas was to owe nothing in future to the charms of poetry; they are sternly real in language and in outlook. The dramatic poet of the theatre at Christiania was to develop the most extraordinarily adroit technique that had yet been seen upon the boards, and every page of his work was to demonstrate his knowledge of the resources of the theatre. Ibsen became the object of the wildest execration of people who did not understand his plays, later the victim of equally undiscriminating hero worship among his votaries, finally a legend, almost a myth, to which the Norwegian paragraph writers made frequent contributions of greater industry than veracity. Twenty years after the "Hegira" the prophet returned to Norway, and dying in 1906 full of

* The translations are from Garrett's fine volume of translations from Ibsen.

† Gosse. "Ibsen, a biography."

years and honours, he had won recognition as one of the greatest men of letters in Europe, if not the greatest.

To deal at length with the numerous offspring of a prolific producer is an obvious impossibility, but dividing his life into two periods, the epoch of poetry, of "Brand" and "Peer Gynt," and the epoch of prose, of "The League of Youth," "Pillars of Society," "The Doll's House," "Ghosts," "An Enemy of the People," "The Wild Duck," and other plays, we may broadly summarise his activity.*

The creator of Peer Gynt and Brand, especially of Brand, is a dramatic poet who scaled some of the loftiest heights. He can express himself in burning phrases of intense simplicity, a master of poignant and harrowing situations, a prophet with a message who is content to make of all his striking poetic gifts only a weapon of piercing keenness, a barbed shaft of invective which speeds straight and unerringly to his enemy's heart. Just as Plato, before he bestows on his good man the title "good," will plunge him into all the trials and tortures which imagination can conceive, stripping goodness of all its adventitious advantages, reputation, popularity, respect, so in Brand we have a prophet who will strip decent disguise of all its rags, who will wage truceless war against wrong, whose watchword is "All or Nought." His progress through life under the influence of this principle is worked out with great power. He leaves towns to preach in the wilderness, he would have his flock do so also, he denies his dying Mother forgiveness because she wants to bargain, he sacrifices his darling child to a cruel climate rather than desert his people, and he stabs his wife to the heart by his ruthless abnegation. His end comes rightly in the wilderness, in a waste of ice and mountains. He stands and calls on Heaven for an answer, and the answer comes in the descent of an avalanche from which a voice is heard proclaiming "God is Love." It is the most tremendous scene in modern dramatic literature.

As we may imagine Shakespeare sitting to himself for Hamlet, Byron to himself for Don Juan, so undoubtedly Ibsen was his own model in the delineation of Brand. He could detach himself from his own creation, he could criticise, even transcend himself, but "All or Nought" is exactly the principle which Ibsen asserted all his life, the attitude of lyrical completeness towards life's problems which he ingeminated. "How can I *will* the impossible?" says Julian the Apostate to Maximus in another play. Comes the answer quick "Is it worth while to *will* what is possible?" As Dowden points out, Brand does will the impossible "as every uncompromising idealist must." He is a man among fragments of men. The Mayor is only a petty wheel of the state machinery, the Dean "a moral drill-sergeant, a corporal who leads his troops at the regulation pace to church on one day of the week," and neither "has a human personality in the true sense of the word." Such was Grimstad, such was Norwegian life as a whole to Ibsen. In later life Ibsen was less grim and ruthless, but "Brand" is the true reflex of the penury and bleakness, the stress and starvation of earlier days.

"Peer Gynt" is rather a scherzo, and like any scherzo too prolonged, is tiring at times. Peer is the typical man of no character, the onion which can be peeled and peeled but has no core or kernel. He is like Kipling's Tomlinson of Berkeley Square, fit neither

* As I have said at the outset, I am not dealing with the "last phase," that of symbolism.

for Heaven nor Hell; the Devil would not care " to throw away dearly bought fuel in times like these on such spiritless rubbish as this." He is a coward and braggart who is always living in an atmosphere of dream and illusion, whose maxim is " To thyself be enough," and who probably boasts that he is " Emperor of himself," which he obviously is not. The work is a dramatic poem rather than a drama, or perhaps one should rather style this loosely knit dramatic biography a Norwegian versified "Don Quixote," *longo intervallo*. Dowden finds in Peer " a charming irresponsible Autolycus of the fjords," but this is rating him rather highly. He can fix his image in one woman's tender heart, he can despite his wanderings and fickleness make her say, " Thou hast made all my life a beautiful song," and this is the best that can be claimed for him. " Peer Gynt " is too long, and no work of the greatest genius is ever *that*. But in this riot of fantasy unduly prolonged scenes like that of Peer in the abode of the Trolls, Peer and Solveig, the Pastor's speech, and the finely pathetic and oft praised death-bed scene between Peer and his old Mother Aase, help to redeem the incoherency and capriciousness of the whole. Critics like Brandes have denounced the weakness of the work, though Brandes ultimately repented and recanted. But " Peer Gynt " is an amalgam, and there is an unpleasantly large amount of baser metal in it.

The writer of " Peer Gynt " and " Brand " was unquestionably a man of poetic genius. He was now to cast poetry aside. With " Pillars of Society " he determined to abandon masquerading romanticism, the external stimulus to the imagination which lies in remoteness of time and unfamiliarity of scene and costume, the better to perform his appointed mission, to make the comfortable classes uncomfortable, to scourge his fellowmen, and above all his countrymen. He is the denouncer of the sins of respectability, the unsparing castigator of pillars of society who are no better than they should be. Picture Norway in the rosy colours in which it appears to the casual visitant of the " land of the Midnight Sun," with its imposing fjords and jagged coasts and lofty icefields, its pleasant simple people dwelling in small quaint clean towns, a country which once had a history (of which it dreams in Peer Gynt fashion) but is now happy to have none, a land in which might be realised, as one would have thought, all the qualities which have led theorists in the past to laud the tiny commonwealth. But to a Norwegian man of genius it is the cramping effect of the small community that obsesses, its " prudence " in foreign affairs, its " moderation " in local affairs, the decent disguise of abject fear. Norway is a pleasant place to spend a summer holiday in, but the thinker and the prophet must, like the eider-duck, fare Southwards and sunwards with bleeding breast. " Up here by the fjords, is my native land. But—but—but! Where am I to find my homeland? " Elsewhere he says " Liberty is the first and highest condition for me. At home they do not trouble much about liberty, but only about liberties—a few more or a few less, according to the standpoint of their party." Their mental pabulum is the " Parliamentary News " and the " Lutheran Weekly," and they are so plebeian, or shall we say bourgeois? It is a place where the Pillars of Society fear the " People's Messenger," the " People's Messenger " fears its subscribers, and everyone fears the weaker brother. It is a starched and stiff community which is always thinking about the next issue of the local paper and its contents, or the next elections. It rates morality high, but " this moral linen has a tainted smell just like a shroud," it is the morality of hypocrites and quack-salvers.

It is a sad reflection for the idyllic sentimentalist, but the picture of an Ibsen or a Crabbe is profounder and truer than his own, though not the whole truth. Corydon and Thyrsis are less charming in real life than they are in pastorals, and country life is not a scene of Watteau's. William Tells are infrequent outside the legendary age ; Themistocles and Aristides do not arise too frequently in Grimstad, or even in Athens. The small town or the small state, so charming to the superficial sentimentalist, so free from fret and turmoil, is the hotbed of the petty vices. Alas ! for those amiable simple folk, so trustful of the English tourist, so natural, so unspoiled, they all are citizens of Grimstad, they are members of the " Norwegian Nation," 2,000,000 cats and dogs, as Ibsen comprehensively dubbed them. And Ibsen has at them with his flail. Whether it is Consul Bernick, the pillar of society who stands upon the self-denial of his wife's brother, Steensgaard the patriotic orator with his " monkey tricks " of eloquence who so suspiciously resembles Ibsen's great rival Björnson, or the Sheriff in " Brand " who does " his duty, but you see, always within my shrievalty," coolly appropriates Brand's building schemes and works them into a vast combination of Church, Poor House, Asylum and Town-Hall, he shows how nothing but an earthquake will awaken certain people from their slumbers of self-satisfaction to a sense of the need of a complete change and the draining of moral swamps.

Mr. Arnold Bennett has written admirably of the dangers which threaten the artist turned pamphleteer. The more crying the abuse, the more urgent the remedy, the keener the insight of the preacher, the more inevitably will his heresies become platitudes. The very truth of the Ibsenic view of life—in so far as it is true—renders his works less effective now, relics of bygone blindness and forgotten controversies. " Ghosts," a play which was denounced deliriously on its first appearance as nasty, obscene, revolting, may now be found—as the writer discovered at a meeting of the Head Masters' Conference—reposing in the odour of sanctity on the library shelves of the City of London School, sealed with the *cachet* of respectability of the City Fathers. The age of the " womanly woman " as Mr. Bernard Shaw calls her, must pass. Woman must be treated as an equal, not bullied as an inferior, or petted as a child. But who denies it ? The artist turned satirist exposes himself to two criticisms. Savage indignation is too often the product of dyspepsia, and it is doubtful how far one who wishes to give anything like a veracious portrait of the human race should indulge in it. Moreover it is a weapon which misses fire. Virtue becomes a truculent virago, the good man a screaming fanatic. For both these reasons Ibsen's plays, effective enough as they were after the first storm of execration had subsided, have lost the startlingness of novelty. We note exaggeration and travesty, we do not note the numerous examples of justness of view. Satire may be a necessary medicine ; some need the whip, though others need sweet reasonableness. The lusty plying of the scourge, the furious lashing of the shoulders of universal humanity—and Ibsen put a savage gusto into much of his satire—may merely tire the executioner. And we have a dim suspicion too that all this busy work of a frenzied arm is but the flogging of a dead horse.

Rarely has a writer been so completely summed up in his works. He deliberately locked himself up within the four walls of his personality, deliberately made himself a sealed book. He was the least lovable of all great writers, and for thirty years neither saw nor wrote to his father. The owner of a scorpion—his one weakness—he is himself the clearest example of the scorpion in literature. He saw no none, he sat in his study

where he did nothing at all but " sat bent over the pacific ocean of his own mind, which mirrored for him a world far more fascinating, vast, and rich, than that which lay spread about him." Or he would take his walks abroad, his hands behind him, the incarnation of heavy respectability, with his gold-rimmed spectacles, his top hat, and tightly buttoned frock-coat, a forbidding figure whom not the most daring would tackle. At Rome, or later at Christiania, he would sit in a café facing a mirror behind a newspaper, " engaged in the incessant observation of real life, the incessant capture of unaffected unconsidered phrases, with actual living experience leaping in his hands like a wild animal, the substance of his dreams and dramas."* Such was the man, the living incarnation of the spirit of his plays, one who glowered with speechless fury at a stranger who had taken his seat in the Grand Café—he had other qualities of the bear besides the dancing faculty—who declared that friends were a costly luxury, branded the population of Norway as 2,000,000 cats and dogs, and, being reminded that there were sound potatoes and rotten potatoes, averred that he had never seen the former. But of his craftsmanship there is no question. No celebrated writer except Herbert Spencer read so little. He had scant knowledge of Shakespeare, the French dramatists, or the German writers ; he worked without a library. Yet he pondered and pondered over his characters until the children of his fancy had acquired a separate existence. In his plays it has been said, " we have the characters in process of catastrophe, their fortune is the result of a presupposed development of many years ; " the clash of temperament which is the motive of so many of his dramas is the result of forces which have been long at work. " Like a coral island he built up his theme in silence." To the select few with whom he sometimes talked of his work he would reveal an uncanny knowledge of his puppets' ante-dramatic history. There was nothing of chance in them. They had developed and grown with a free and unchecked life which their master had done all he could to foster.

Whatever else then one may question, we cannot question the technique of the playwright. It is consummate. He pondered over his themes until every difficulty had been met, he worked at his material until he had forged it into entire coherency. His personages rarely talk brilliantly, but the dialogue is strikingly true to character. Nora in " A Doll's House " is a magnificent example, and an actress of commanding personality and striking gifts would be needed to impersonate her. The backgrounds are finished, the stage directions elaborate but not superfluous, the old devices of asides and soliloquies disappear. The play is, in the last period, mechanically perfect. Yet even for the telling of a story we feel that nature with all its profuse incoherence is better than the rigidly efficient plot. With some show of justice Mr. Bernard Shaw condemns the sensational horrors of Shakespeare's borrowed plots, inorganic accessories, pretexts for dramatising human nature as it exists in the normal world. And yet the old method, the method of the Greeks, strictly confined as they were to the ancient mythology, or of Shakespeare who lifted his plots—" convey the wise it call "—from where he could, has produced dramas unsurpassable. The story had grown naturally, it existed to enforce no thesis, it was the artless, impersonal expression of one of the most definitely human faculties, the mythopœic. The nameless inventors of the legend of Œdipus, the first narrator of the tale of Arthur, Saxo Grammaticus, and other chroniclers have one great merit, they had

* Gosse, " Ibsen."

no *parti pris*. And sometimes as we part from the well-packed plot elaborately contrived and marvellously organised, in which everything is jointed and morticed with dexterity almost diabolic, we feel that we love better some ancient folktale as old as humanity itself, based deep down on the foundations of man's nature, to take it, to realise all its capabilities, τὰ ἐνόντα, and to transmute and transcend nature rather than resort to all the dovetailing of the carpenter's shop.

It has been claimed that Ibsen has evolved a new dramatic form. As the old play consisted of exposition, situation, and unravelling, so the new play consists of exposition and discussion, and discussion is the core of the play. A play is now not a conflict between virtue and vice, it is a conflict of unsettled ideals. The villain is as conscientious as the hero, perhaps more so.* Despite his dogmatic paradox and mystifying pyrotechnics, Mr. Shaw seems to have proved his point, as far as modern times are concerned. The technique is not new in one sense. "It is the technique of playing on the human conscience. We are guilty creatures sitting at a play, the forensic technique of recrimination, disillusion, and penetration through ideals to the truth is a species of revelation" that forces on us the conviction—put crudely in the Shavian way—that the Almighty has not retired from business, and even that there is scope for a frankly doctrinal theatre.

"A Doll's House," "Brand," and Peer Gynt" would be landmarks in European literature even though we did not accept the Ibsenic point of view, and regarded Ibsen's prose plays as caricatures rather than criticisms of life. Ibsen is what he is because, like his own Brand, he will have All or Nought. Tell him that Peer Gynt is a wasted piece of phantasy, and he replies, "My book *is* poetry. And if it is not, it will be. The conception of poetry in our country, in Norway, shall be made to conform to the work." Like Brand, he was a moral pioneer. He could claim that his plays dealt with everything connected with his personal experience, and aimed at his own spiritual emancipation and purification. His own emancipation led to the emancipation of many in his own country and in the world at large. His boldest things are hoary platitudes, he has been canonised into respectability. But he could truly assert "At the point where I stood when I wrote each of my books, there now stands a fairly compact multitude, but I myself am there no longer, I am elsewhere and, I hope, farther ahead." For, as he would maliciously say to his democratic friend and rival Björnson, the minority is always right, and he resembled Dr. Stockmann in his horror of the "damned compact majority." And just as a halo of sublimity encircles Brand in failure, desolation, and destruction such as never irradiates the practical statesman-opportunist, so too the minority "which is always right" is always the winning cause. Its triumph is based on the fundamental verity that despite the difficulties of the process, the jeers of the neighbours, the danger of contact with the stellar system, man *must* hitch his waggon to a star, and that, in the long run, the only practical counsel is the counsel of perfection. Such has been the method of Plato, and of all the great dynamic forces of humanity. Compromise is a thin diet; intransigeance has been inscribed upon the banners of all pioneers. There is indeed

* If Mr. Shaw had cared to go back to Aristotle he would have found that this is no novelty. The "Antigone" of Sophocles has a very virtuous villain, and the plays of Euripides are oftentimes, unhappily, very lengthy discussions. Hegel too, some time before Mr. Shaw, had declared that tragedy is a conflict not between good and bad, but between two principles, each good.

a *mediocritas*, a mean which is not the shibboleth of chaffering hucksters, a mean which is truly, in the Horatian sense, of fine gold, a mean so oft elusive which a man may seize in some happy moment, there is a nicest equipoise between two opposing rights which one may aim at and by the Fates' kindness hit the mark, there *is* a *via media* which may bear one safely on the forlorn venture between Scylla and Charybdis, but " moderation " that typical English quality, the badge of moral cowardice, is the most villainous virtue that ever was invented. The idealist will always—in the long run—triumph over the opportunist, he will find the latter, as Brand did the Sheriff, coming to his house to get the loan of his thunderbolts. Often he will, with outward unreason but in obedience to a true guiding instinct, turn impatiently from the hustings to his study, from the committee room to his cloistral cell. He will renounce the battle, and disdain the conflict, but in his solitude he will forge the levin bolts which shall scatter and overwhelm his enemies. " The only important revolution," as Ibsen once said, " is the revolution of the spirit of Man " and so he has, he thinks, an answer to his friend the Revolutionary Orator.

" They say I'm becoming conservative ;
No : still in my life-long creed I live.
Yonr changing pawns is a futile plan,
Make a sweep of the chess-board, and I'm your man.
Was never but one revolution unfaltering
That was not marred by half-hearted paltering.
To that, all since were but idle menaces.
I allude, of course, to the Deluge in Genesis.
Yet Lucifer tripped even then ; by a later ship
Came Noah, you remember, and seized the dictatorship.
Let us go, next time, to the root of the matter.
It needs men to act as well as to chatter.
You deluge the world to its topmost mark,
With pleasure I will torpedo the Ark."

Satire is a Κάθαρσις which seeks in the literary device of hyperbole a relief from the oppression of the wrath and bitterness which over-charge it. The lines to the Revolutionary Orator need not be taken *au pied de la lettre*, though they are earnest enough. The nobler, more compassionate, lines of a great English writer are an interesting contrast and afford room for thought.

" Judge gently the tasked world, and disincline
To brand it, for it bears a heavy pack.
You have perchance observed the inebriate's track
At night when he has quitted the inn-sign ;
He plays diversions on the homeward line,
Still that way bent albeit his legs are slack,
A hedge may take him, but he turns not back,
Nor turns this burdened world, of curving spine.
' Spiral,' the memorable Lady terms
Our mind's ascent ; our world's advance presents
That figure on a flat, the way of worms.
Cherish the promise of its good intents
And warn it, not one instinct to efface
Ere Reason ripens for the vacant place."*

* George Meredith, Sonnet. " The World's Advance."

Ibsen the man, as we have said, claims little notice. No man less lovable, less dominating by his personal gifts, has won great literary fame. Yet to have produced the work of Ibsen is sufficient evidence of rare gifts of mind. How shall we sum the count ? In middle life he made the great renunciation. He gave up poetry, the glow and colour of romance for the dull hues of reality, for stark facts. It was a great renunciation of the finer half of his imaginative side, but like Brand, Ibsen was equal to any sacrifice. He called human life before his bar for judgment, it is by that judgment we must judge him. He is the scorpion. Touch him and he will discharge his venom. Beauty is not his end. Norway is asleep and he will steam up the fjord from the open sea with many a fog-horn blast.* " The lines are all precipitous and abrupt." Like the cormorant he is " bent upon attaining his project with a quite relentless resolve and with incessant beat of pinions." There is a savage chillness about his writings well suited to the Polar regions. Generosity does not flourish in these high latitudes. It is a land of stunted growths and dwarfed ideals, and even the fitful brilliance of the *aurora borealis* is denied us. Wrong is to Ibsen almost a personal injury. Misanthropy is his creed, and manslaughter his pastime. He scorns and despises the human race, so mean in its outer mould of respectability, so shortsighted, so unimaginative, and therefore so cruel. Judging him by the Arnoldian system of taking isolated lines as touchstones, we should find none like the οὗτοι συνεχθεῖν ἀλλὰ συμφιλεῖν ἔφυν of the Antigone, or the " sunt lacrimæ rerum " of Virgil. His best lines would be lines of passionate fury, and scathing wrath, or cold contempt. In a celebrated passage Heine said " Lay on my coffin a sword, for I was a brave soldier in the War of Freedom for mankind." So too was Ibsen, but he fleshed his sword upon mankind as well as for mankind. The greatest tragedies leave us with the sense of tears in human things. " But yet the pity of it, Iago, O, Iago, the pity of it, Iago." We find tears in Ibsen but tears of rage ; we might also fancy echoes of demoniacal laughter.

Yet he grew gentler as he grew more prosperous. The eulogist of All or Nought was a crafty investor who faithful to the homely maximum did *not* put all his eggs in one basket. He is a proof of the humanising power of dividends, the healing potency of pensions, and the eider's Southern nest was well feathered. Though it is questionable whether we ought to put our poets on the Civil List and find our painters the soft job, the policy approved itself for once, and the Storthing which treated its scorpion so well can claim to have assisted him to greatness. A fat bank balance leads to a less jaundiced view of life. Ibsen's bitterest tirades were to be outdone by the Swedish Strindberg, the dramatist of the ghastliness of life, the neurotic subject who at his gloomiest realised the full Macbethian summary of life, an idiot's tale full of sound and fury signifying nothing. In the "Wild Duck" indeed, Ibsen seems to jest at himself in the person of Gregers Werle; he has discovered that sometimes to reveal the truth is more foolish than to conceal it. The eider returned to the fjords and ice-fields to be fêted and idolised, and to die full of years and honour in the cosiest of nests.

* * * * * * * * * *

* Dowden.

IBSEN

We realise after reading Ibsen that what we call mid-Victorianism was a European phenomenon It was with us an age beset by a cowardice (partly moral, partly intellectual) which shrank from following things to their consequences, and in a crisis always sought a *via media*, and tried somewhat ineffectively to find a philosophical basis for its lack of courage. It had at length accepted the Reform Bill, a little nervously, but it was periodically scared by the " red fool fury of the Seine," and alarmed by speculations as to the origin of the species, and its ideal in politics was a monstrous animal called a Liberal-Conservative, who was generally a very conservative Liberal. It pitied Carlyle for his dyspepsia, alternately lamented and smiled at Ruskin's freakishness, it admired Browning for his somewhat shallow optimism, and it did not read George Meredith. Tennyson was its prophet and patron saint, and did into melodious and highly ornamented verse, which often indeed reached a lofty height of beauty, the gospel of compromise " rich in saving common sense." Its prose oracle was the *Daily Telegraph*, which oddly enough did not begin to expound these views until most people were abandoning them, and then the earth, as Arnold tells us in a passage of urbane humour, was " filled and ennobled every morning by the magnificent roaring " of its young lions. One thing Mid-Victorianism did beyond our power, better and wiser as we so much are, it produced great men of letters. And this Mid-Victorianism we find was endemic in Europe, not least in little Norway with its prim precisionists and pharisees of full blown phylacteries. Those who extol Ibsen as a Norwegian poet and admire him as a local colourist who did for his country in verse and prose what Grieg—a far weaker individuality—did for it in music, miss the point. Delightful, eerily charming, even haunting as his music is, Grieg with his strange harmonies and delicate effects, and elusive insubstantiality, demonstrates the limits of local colour. He is perhaps, as a rival composer described him, an unrivalled manufacturer of sugar-coated confectionery of varied hue, which melts in the mouth.* But it is an infinitely greater thing to be a world poet than to be the poet of Norway, and it is Ibsen's greatest title to fame that similar characters might be found in any parish of Gloucestershire, in any commune of Normandy, or in any other European backwater, and that in scathing the errors of Norway he initiated a European movement. The world needs periodically its dose of spring medicine, it needs to cut away dead matter, and putrescent ideals. The world had been living on crumbs from the revolution table of 1789, a food out of which, as Ibsen declared, all nourishment had been chewed. A new diet must be found, and found it was, even if " Ghosts " must seem nasty, vile, revolting to the *Daily Telegraph* of 1880. Mid-Victorianism was being slowly undermined, the fuse was lit, the mine was fired, and Mid-Victorianism flew on an aerial voyage to the Ewigkeit.

A glacial chill pervades the works of Ibsen. In this Polar Circle of humanity we shiver, denied the winter overcoat of optimism and the eiderdown quilt of a comfortable conscience. Ibsen is as little inclined to bestow his forgiveness on humanity as Brand upon his dying Mother. He set his characters before us stark naked, he strikes us chill to the inmost marrow. He is like a pianist playing on an instrument out of tune and taking a malicious joy in picking out the most jangling notes. To all great writers from Homer

* Peer Gynt led to the collaboration of Ibsen and Grieg, and the latter wrote some very charming and very popular incidental music which every orchestra has in its repertory. It is interesting to learn that Ibsen could make neither head nor tail of it.

downward life has its tragic aspect, a battle against Nature, the Fates, the Trolls, and all the other thwarting powers that imagination has conceived. Man is weak, wavering, sometimes helpless, but never absolutely despicable as Swift or Ibsen depict him. The very greatest writer will not be splenetic, he will not bark at life like a dog at the limit of his chain, he will not see blue devils as Strindberg sometimes does, the victim of an eternal liverishness ; he will be like Sophocles εὔκολος, he will in Arnold's phrase " see life steadily and see it whole," *sub specie quadam universi*. The greatest men still have that touch of nature which makes the whole world kin, and the greatest works of the human mind leave us with a sense of the tears in human things, with a feeling that humanity has been defeated, but on a noble stage, in no inglorious combat against higher powers and the limitations of human things.

> " Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
> Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,
> Dispraise or blame ; nothing but well and fair
> And what may quiet us in a death so noble."

And if we ask ourselves why " Brand " is not as great as " King Lear," and " Peer Gynt " not as excellent as " Don Quixote," here seems the answer. Ibsen lives in a world of frenzied prophets and craven Pillars of Society, and covetous money getters, and their inhumanity is not mitigated by even a drunken Porter. It is not merely that all characters are contemptible failures, it is that the Ibsenic view involves an utter lack of sympathy, that Ibsen forgets that, in the apostolic phrase, he too is a man. He leads us at times to the verge of intellectual nihilism ; like Samson, to end his thraldom, he would pull down all the pillars of modern life, to his destruction and to ours.

Ibsen is inhuman, and it is the first duty of a great poet to be loyal to the human race, to aver himself a citizen of humanity not of the Yahoos. The greatest writers need that wide and steady vision, a compassion for and with all things human, akin to that divine Virgilian pity which is almost feminine in its instinctive sympathy. They need too the fine aloofness of " emotion recollected in tranquillity " such as we find in the Orpheus and Eurydice episode of the fourth Georgic, or in a play of Sophocles. In that exquisitely touching play the Œdipus Coloneus, we have a hero, the victim—as a critic of the Euripidean school might have said—of all the thwarting destinies. He faces the bludgeonings of chance with a bravery less blusterous than Henley's. He is old, blind, dependent on his daughter for his daily needs, helpless against armed force, shunned by those who know his story as a polluted miscreant whose iniquity has brought down on his head the vengeance of the gods. But he confronts all with a firm sense of the rightness of his cause, he waits with a sure confidence for that divine sign which shall mark his final justification. This drama written by an old man bordering on his tenth decade gives a more complete and higher poetic satisfaction than " Brand." It is not merely that Greek is infinitely more beautiful than any other language, and that Greek writers seem natural artists, it is because Ibsen's intensity leads to an inevitable narrowness. He has not scaled all the heights, or plumbed all the depths, of passion and imagination, he lacks the universality and myriad-mindedness which mark the most consummate artist.

And so one comes to the question, " Will Ibsen weather ? " " Will he hold out ? " against the wrackful siege of time. His serviceableness as a pioneer may prove his undoing as a poet. Which must we rank the higher, poet or prophet ? Poetry is perhaps the rarer gift. Our little systems have their day, they have their day and cease to be, even " damned compact majorities " melt away. Our Benthams and Goodwins have their vogue and do their work, they suffer the neglect and disesteem of the successful platitude. But poetry is a perpetual wellspring of delight and healing. A satirist can in some ages do more than the most heaven-sent Minister of Education to speed on the current of enlightenment, but when an age arrives to which the dramatic treatment of hereditary disease is no novelty (it has come already), when the last emancipated feminist has shut the door of her doll's house with a sounding slam upon the conventions of the " womanly woman "—Ibsen's boldest unconventionalities will seem tame. The greatest minds are probably greater than their books. Johnson was greater than " Rasselas " or the " Lives of the Poets," Goethe most certainly greater than " Faust " or " Wilhelm Meister," but Ibsen was a somewhat spiteful walking edition of the plays of Ibsen, not quite as waspish as Pope, but as sensitive to hostile criticism as Swinburne, as ill-tempered and self-sufficient as Herbert Spencer, and infinitely inferior to his compeer and compatriot Björnson in generous appreciation of the works of others. He was a great explosive force, a solvent of convention as effective as Euripides. Despite his gradual mellowing, despite that clearsightedness which kept him clear of the neurotic excesses of later extremists, and which led him to parody himself most pleasingly as Gregers Werle in the " Wild Duck," one feels he was a little man. He has the bitterness of Plato in Plato's mournful mood, but nothing of that fine urbanity, that tact of expression which the Athenian has, nothing of that definiteness of view which has made Plato one of the great constructive and creative forces in the history of ideas. He was a great lyric poet who trampled on his lyre and flung away his garlands, a nightingale who preferred to be a gadfly. But what he willed to accomplish he did accomplish. No candid critic can turn from " The Doll's House " or " Ghosts," without the conviction that what Ibsen aimed at he achieved, and achieved almost to perfection.

AN EMINENT VICTORIAN

1913

Man is many things, Caliban, Falstaff, Iago, Tom Jones, Hamlet, St. Louis, and Fénélon. He may be as coarse as Aristophanes and Rabelais and Smollett, as whimsical as Charles Lamb, as rancorous as Hazlitt, as savage as Swift, but in his inmost heart there is a shrine to which he pays stealthy visits, where he holds converse with himself and seeks communion with the unseen world, sees unearthly visions, and cherishes unearthly ideals of purity and holiness. Picture man as a savage, ruthless animal, blind, lustful, ravening, or as a satyr, or as a lighthearted ape, but remember that he will lacerate himself with self-inflicted tortures, emaciate himself with penance self-imposed, devote his whole life to gain the Beatific Vision. Besides the farces of the Palais Royal or the indelicacies of Ovid you must set as equally typical of man the " Pensées " of Pascal, the "Confessions" of Augustine, and the "Imitatio Christi."

And though literature may be regarded both by austere pietists and dogmatic worldings—each equally fanatical—as having nothing to do with sacred things, man's religion, his aspirations, even his asceticisms will find their record and their utterance in literature ; and the most catholic critic must find his way into the inner courts of the temple. Literature without a hint of religion would be an imperfect record of man's achievement. It is dangerous to be didactic, it is hazardous for a moral essay to become a sermon, yet—we must recognise the truth—a sermon can become, amongst other things, a work of literary art. And so literature which takes us into the forum, the crowded throng, the theatre, the gaming-house, and even fouler places, will conduct us to the cloistral calm of the man of religion, the tranquil round of penitence and penance, forgiveness, the dedication of one's life to divine service, union with God, the sense of things inexpressible, the peace which passeth all understanding.

Not merely then because men are ensnared by the lure of piquant details, which as a matter of fact the converted sinner rarely furnishes, or because naughtiness is more attractive than stainless virtue, do men delight in the biography of a Bunyan or an Augustine. They read the revelations of a converted sinner because they mark the embryo of a saint in themselves. As the saint says, when he beholds a notorious sinner, " there but for the grace of God go I," so may the average sensual man declare with sadness, confronted by the spectacle of lofty holiness, " such, under happier chances, might I have been." Man in his long upward struggle, amongst his other senses, has developed the sense of sin ; his conscience is as great a reality as his stomach. And many, even in an age which has essayed to shelve the sense of sin, have dimly perceived the symbol of their history in the Prodigal Son, and even when alas ! they neither know their Father nor where to seek Him, they find the words upon their lips " I will arise and go to my Father, and I will say ' Father, I have sinned. ' "

And so, though man is of the earth earthy, there are men to whom there are " two and two only supreme and luminously self-evident beings, myself and my Creator," men for whom kingdoms may wane and monarchs fall unnoticed, engrossed as they are in their daily struggle towards perfection, men for whom the inner, spiritual life is the only

life that counts. We meet them, and it is like visiting another world; we open their books, and it is like entering a monastery. Their lives, troubled by doubts and apprehensions as they often are, beset by spiritual struggles as they must needs be, have yet a harmony and a tranquillity, which we in the fret and fever of the busy world cannot attain. Even in an epoch which has set philanthropy and social reform on the highest pinnacle of virtue, an age which scouts other-worldliness as spiritual valetudinarianism—which indeed it often is —a strange thrill of sympathy courses through us as we read the long record of a soul gradually and painfully developing.

Such a history is that of John Henry Newman, told clearly and faithfully in his own "Apologia," related more fully by Mr. Wilfred Ward in his biography. Newman was one to whom the winning of the whole world was as nothing compared with the loss of his own soul. To him literary achievement was a *πάρεργον*. "I may truly say that I have never been in the practice since I was a boy of attempting to write well or to form an elegant style. I think I have never written for writing's sake; but my one and single desire and aim has been to do what is so difficult, viz: to express clearly and exactly my meaning; this has been the motive principle of all my corrections and rewritings." However that may be, the style is that of a master, as the thoughts are those of a great and subtle intellect. There is a fascination in the study of this accomplished stylist who achieves so much even when he seems to disdain the ornate elaborated style, this striking personality which could not fail either to win enthusiastic devotion, or to excite deep-rooted suspicion and long-lived hostility.

Newman and Manning, coupled together so often by journalist and essayist in an association intensely distasteful to both, in reality resemble each other merely in the one fact that they were both converts to Roman Catholicism. The entirely subjective Newman steeped in literature and theology to his finger tips, a Hamlet lost in thought at the moment for action, aristocratic in all his sympathies and appealing chiefly to the social and intellectual élite of his Communion, long suspected and long under a cloud at Rome, finds his complete antithesis in the untheological, unliterary Manning, ever the favourite of Pope and Propaganda, whose practicality and rigorous adherence to conventional lines of thought, whose intense popular sympathies and quick decision, carried him finally to the Cardinal Archbishop's throne at Westminster. Saints alas! and many good men who have put forward no claims to saintliness or apostleship, have from the days of Paul and Barnabas found it easier to detect motes in their brother's eye than the beam in their own, and it was the misfortune of both these great and good men to misunderstand and mistrust each other. Nor did their loyal followers, prone like most loyal followers to out-Herod Herod, render the situation easier by their blind partisanship. In most of the many troubles of his life, in the futile attempt to establish an Irish University, in the failure of the scheme to found a mission at Oxford, Newman seemed to detect the hand of Manning, and a perusal of the letters which passed between Newman and Manning suggests that the latter was not anxious that the former should receive the honour of a Cardinal's Hat, and did what decently could be done to thwart the Pope's desire to honour Newman. Newman however, by his own diffidence in accepting the proffered distinction, must reduce Manning's share of the blame. It was carefully noted that Manning's butler was named Newman, and evil constructions were put upon

this innocent circumstance. Mr. J. E. C. Bodley, who was admitted by Manning to his intimacy in his later years, tells us that the Archbishop once in conversation ticked off in his usual way on his taper fingers ten distinct heresies to be found in the most widely read works of Dr. Newman. Possibly Manning did not understand Newman, whose subtle mind always seemed to arrive at orthodox conclusions in apparently unorthodox ways.* However that may be, such were the feelings of Manning and his disciples. Mr. Bodley quotes with approval Acton's description of Newman as "a sophist, the manipulator, not the servant of truth," he describes Ward's biography as "an enduring monument to the most attractive and most colossal egoist that ever lived," he scathingly terms Newman "not a great Englishman, not a great Oxford man, nor a great Catholic, but a great Newmanite," and yet in spite of Newman's deficiencies as an Oxford man, his Paradise, we are told, was "a beatific Oxford common room where he elected the members and also chose the wines." However there is no place for the party system in either literature or religion, and few will rise from a study of Ward's biography without intense admiration for Newman's literary gifts, love for his real devoutness and saintliness, and compassion for the tortures which his temperament inflicted upon him.

A few biographical details will suffice. Newman was born in 1801 in the City of London. In 1816, he was sent to Trinity College, Oxford We are told that his father did not decide between Oxford and Cambridge till the post chaise was at the door, and that he was then overcome by the importunities of an Oxford friend. So narrowly did Cambridge escape the glories and the trials of a Cambridge Movement. In 1821 Newman was elected Fellow of Oriel and soon made himself a name, especially after his appointment as Vicar of St. Mary's in 1828. After the stoppage of the series "Tracts for the Times," owing to the views expressed in the celebrated Tract 90, Newman began to find his position impossible, and a period of great suspense both for him and for Oxford generally followed. Newman retired to Littlemore near Oxford in 1843, and at the end of 1845 was received into the Roman Church. After a visit to Rome it was settled that he should establish an Oratory in Birmingham, which was inaugurated in 1847, and with which for the rest of his life his name is inseparably associated. In 1879 his great services to the Church received some recognition in the offer of a Cardinalate, which he joyfully accepted as an official admission of his services and as a justification of his past career. He died in 1890 in his 90th year.

The study of Newman is the study of a style and of a personality, both of striking interest. The former so tense and nervous, in semblance like a gladiator stripped for the contest, with every muscle standing out taut and ready, and an absence of all rounded contours,† the personality that of a man endowed with all the exquisite perceptions of the artist, and its inevitable concomitant, the acute sensitiveness to every transient trouble, a sea transparent in its waters yet ruffled by every passing breeze that sweeps across its surface. It is a glorious thing to be an artist, but an artist is too often a man

* Others said, like Father Mazio, "I do not know how it is, but so it is, that all these startling things, Mr. Newman brings them round at the end to a good conclusion" Ward, Vol. II., p. 270.

† There are of course brilliant, even gorgeous, passages, but the main note is that of elaborate plainness and simplicity. Newman is perfectly content with the austere style, and as little as any master writes for mere effect.

minus an epidermis, one for whom the petty troubles of life loom large as threatening phantasms, to whom the greater difficulties are agonizing experiences from which he emerges battered and bleeding, the fibres of his soul torn almost into shreds. Such was Newman in his attitude towards the crises that thronged him through a troubled life. Proudly conscious of his own rectitude, still yearning for the good opinion of those whom, as they thought, he had deserted and betrayed, aware that in the Church in which he had now found rest he was regarded as a Laodicean, if not worse, by many whose mean intellects could not comprehend the subtler workings of a more complex brain, he had some ground for regarding all these troubles as the cross imposed by Heaven upon him as a chastening discipline. The years of constrained idleness during which he vainly sought Papal sanction for his Irish University Scheme were followed by the attempt, abortive yet so near success, to establish a mission at Oxford for the benefit of Catholics residing there, and it was only when, a man bowed down by the weight of years, he received the Cardinal's hat that the clouds of doubt and disappointment seemed to lift. From that time happily his days passed by in a serene unclouded succession, and the final call found him awaiting it in perfect peace.

Newman's intellect was one of the subtlest that has ever been devoted to the service of religion. He was the brain of the Oxford movement, the leader and the inspirer of those who sought to revive what they thought the true conception of the Church of England. The history of his intellectual development is unfolded with many details of fascinating interest in the "Apologia," and shews how slow and yet how steady and deliberate was the progression which reached its climax in 1845 with his reception into the Roman Church. The less cannot contain the greater, and therefore it is not surprising that Newman was an enigma to many minds of slighter calibre. To observe Newman's attitude towards received dogmas, to study the characteristic and original way in which he will approach theological problems, is an occupation which gives us fresh insight into the workings of the human mind. No object can appear exactly the same to two different observers, and no theological or intellectual proposition can strike two minds of any original power in exactly the same way. Newman himself by his own doctrine of development suggests that that which has been regarded as immutable can by its very immensity shew ever fresh facets to different ages. We have in Newman an illustration of the suppleness of the human intellect, that flexibility by which, even when imprisoned in the mould of what outsiders have regarded as the most rigid of all systems, it can still by gentle but unceasing efforts break the limits that confine it. "The energy of the human intellect does 'from opposition grow;' it thrives and is joyous, with a tough elastic strength, under the terrible blows of the divinely fashioned weapon, and is never so much itself as when it has lately been overthrown . . . It is the vast Catholic body itself, and it only, which affords an arena for both combatants," (authority and private judgment) "in that awful, never-dying duel . . . As in a civil polity, the state exists and endures by means of the rivalry and collision, the encroachments and defeats of its constituent parts, so in like manner Catholic Christendom is no simple exhibition of religious absolutism, but it presents a continuous picture of authority and private judgment alternately advancing and retreating as the ebb and flow of the tide; —it is a vast assemblage of human beings with wilful intellects and wild passions, brought together into one by the beauty and the

majesty of a superhuman power."* Or to put the matter in a less lofty way, it is possible with theological propositions, as with Acts of Parliament, to drive a coach and four through them.

Mr. Ward† has done full justice to Newman's many-sidedness. To some "Newman is before all things a religious philosopher—and he has often been compared with Pascal. There are others, like Lord Morley, who appear to see in him little more than a great master of English prose who is hardly to be reckoned a thinker at all. By yet others he has been placed in the category of the great ecclesiastical writers in history, the eloquence and force in some of his later sermons suggesting a comparison with Bossuet, his personal charm and delicate balance of mind recalling Fénélon." To others he is the champion of Catholicism against Kingsley and Gladstone, to others his writings seem to belong "not to provincial dogma but to the literature of all time," and to others he is a theologian with an unequalled knowledge of the first three centuries of Church history. And his temperament is a fascinating study. "The delicate perceptions which charmed so many were a part of the artist's temperament, sensitive to praise and blame, craving for sympathy." He had too that "habit of minute psychological introspection which is apt to beget something of Hamlet's temperament." "Difficulties were too vividly present to his mind in all his undertakings. The sceptic's mind was vividly present to Newman's imagination. He saw to the full the plausibility of the case which might be made out against the truths he most deeply believed . . . His deepest convictions were compatible with a keen sense of all that told against them."

There were fallow periods in Newman's life, but his collected works run to many volumes. His "Idea of a University" contains his mature thoughts on education, though the underlying purpose is no doubt theological. His views either on education or on subtle points of ethics, his occasional excursions into literary criticism, his easy mastery of almost every form of expression, would separately have sufficed to make the reputation of a smaller man. He is a true Oxford man in his devotion to classical studies and to Aristotle, of whom he finely says "While we are men, we cannot help, to a great extent, being Aristotelians, for the great Master does but analyse the thoughts, feelings, views, and opinions of human kind. He has told us the meaning of our own words and ideas, before we were born. In many subject-matters, to think correctly, is to think like Aristotle." He indulges in passing in many felicitous pieces of criticism, and modern views as to "useful" studies, and as to the value of a smattering in all things, are severely handled.

The lectures on "The Idea of a University" constitute a great work in which are enshrined many profound truths of lasting value, truths to be meditated and pondered over, the noblest contribution to the philosophy of education that has been ever made, stamped with the impress of a wide-ranging, subtle, and finely sensitive mind. Nothing lends itself so easily as education to facile writing. There is not one sentence of this kind in "The Idea of a University." No author is more willing to be pedestrian when the argument requires it; he exacts from his reader the closest attention to elaborate and rigorous reasoning. He has a vast subject and a comprehensive scheme, and not one passage is there which has not its fitting place in the scheme. He indulges neither in eloquent commonplaces nor in cumbrous technical jargon, and for this reason is frequently neglected by educational theorists. But whenever terseness of phrase, fertility

* The "Apologia." † Ward, pp. 2-3, 15-16.

of imagery, or pregnant aphorism can heighten the effect of his argument, there we may expect to find a force, a nobility, or even a grandeur of expression, worthy of the theme.

The " Apologia," a work of greater fame (for the world always loves the personal encounter) attains perhaps a lower standard of excellence. The description of a mind's growth and its gradual passage in strict logical sequence from one creed to another is a piece of masterly portraiture, but the author's morbid sensitiveness is too much in evidence, and not every reader can be expected to take deep interest in a theological process. Newman's subtlety, his masterly irony, and scathing invective might have been reserved for higher game than the apostle of " muscular Christianity." He wrote under tremendous pressure—for the work came out in weekly parts—racing against time with his fingers sometimes " travelling twenty miles a day," as he hyperbolically declares, racked by the most painful emotions and often shedding tears. But his purpose was achieved and his reputation with his countrymen restored. " Whatever judgment my readers may eventually form of me from these pages, I am confident that they will believe me in what I shall say in the course of them. I have no misgiving at all that they will be ungenerous or harsh with a man who has been so long before the eyes of the world, who has so many to speak of him from personal knowledge . . . who has ever spoken too much rather than too little : who has never slurred over facts and reasonings which told against himself : who has never given his name or authority to proofs which he thought unsound, or to testimony which he did not think at least plausible . . . who has given up much that he loved and prized and could have retained, but that he loved honesty better than name, and truth better than dear friends."

Of Newman's controversial works in defence of Catholicism the " Lectures on the present state of Catholics," are well-known as brilliant examples of apologetic in which Newman's powers of sarcasm are given full play. Protestants should surely study these specimens of hard-hitting controversy, even if some of the hits are mis-hits.* The description of the Russian Count inflaming his Moscow audience by an account of the British Constitution and in particular of the dogma that " the King can do no wrong " is brilliantly conceived and brilliantly executed, and a still more remarkable *tour de force*—perfect in conception, force, and effect—is his summary of the anti-Popish *clichés* " Fling upon the gale the faintest whisper of Catholicism, and it (Anglicanism) recognises by instinct its connatural foe. Forthwith, as during the last year, the atmosphere is tremuous with agitation, and discharges its vibrations far and wide. A moment is in birth which has no natural crisis or resolution. Spontaneously the bells of the steeples begin to sound. Not by an act of volition, but by a sort of mechanical impulse, bishop and dean, archdeacon and canon, rector and curate, one after another, each on his high tower, off they set, swinging and booming, tolling and chiming, with nervous intenseness, and thickening emotion and deepening volume, the old ding-dong which has scared town and country this weary time ; tolling and chiming away, jingling and clamouring and ringing the changes on their poor half-dozen notes, all about ' the Popish aggression ' ' insolent and insidious,' ' insidious and insolent,' ' insolent and atrocious ' ' atrocious and insolent,' ' atrocious, insolent, and ungrateful ' ' ungrateful, insolent, and atrocious,'

* For once we find Newman a partisan, harsh, bitter, and even unfair. From this point of view they are sometimes even painful reading.

'foul and offensive,' 'pestilent and horrid,' 'subtle and unholy,' 'audacious and revolting,' 'contemptible and shameless,' 'malignant, 'frightful,' 'mad,' 'meretricious' —bobs (I think the ringers call them) bobs, and bobs-royal, and triple bob-majors, and grandsires—to the extent of their compass and the full ring of their metal, in honour of Queen Bess, and to the confusion of the Holy Father and the Princes of the Church."

But such amazing power over language is generally restrained, though it illustrates the many-sidedness of Newman, pietist, controversialist, theologian, historian, and master of human speech. Yet again and again we turn from his works to the strange attraction of his personality, at times so wayward and always so far aloof from the dust and din of everyday life, or to his career so self-pivoted, so entirely concentrated on the things of the spirit. Though we are told that Newman took a lively interest in the topics of the time, this interest, his writings lead us to suppose, was merely his solitary relaxation from the tension of a mode of life which was always " voyaging through strange seas of thought." That disregard or disdain of hostility and prejudice which is expressed or implied in most of his works was but the mask of an ever-present sensibility to what people said or thought, which led him once to denounce Manning, his Metropolitan, and two other leading members of the Hierarchy as the Three Tailors of Tooley Street, to assail with the most biting invective Propaganda and its both high-handed and under-handed treatment of himself, and to describe the advocates of Papal Infallibility as an " insolent and aggressive faction." The daws amongst his fellow religionists were ever pecking at his exposed heart amid outcries not less agonising because reserved for his intimates alone. But acute susceptibility towards the attacks of rancorous malevolence or the misconceptions of thick-witted prejudice is a weakness which deserves gentle treatment. The gods may have showered all other blessings on the unhappy victims, but their moral panoply is somewhat incomplete, and the barbed shafts of calumny and the jagged sword of spite can inflict many a painful though not a vital wound. Newman however never lacked the consolations of a band of devoted friends who comforted their master in his depression, and championed his cause against the foe without. Well might he choose for his motto as Cardinal the phrase "cor ad cor loquitur"—heart speaks to heart.

It is hard to characterise perfection, and it is difficult adequately to express one's admiration for Newman's style. Yet even a man so different as Henley, the apostle of the robust, felt its magic. Newman does not play the virtuoso like De Quincey, who swaggers up to the conductor's desk, and with a *tumultuoso* as he raises his baton, tells us what tune the orchestra will play. Of style for style's own sake Newman thought nothing, yet so certain is his touch that he can adapt himself with unfailing ease to all the exigencies of his subject. No master knows better how to achieve the perfect synthesis of thought and expression ; his noblest passages seem the final and perfect rendering of the idea that he has bodied forth in a consummate interfusion of intellect and emotion. The divine afflatus had been breathed upon *him* too, and none has more closely reproduced in words the actual glow of inspiration, or explained with clearer understanding a great writer's lavish fulness of phrase. " He is master of the two-fold Logos, the thought and the word, distinct, but inseparable from each other. He may, if so be, elaborate his composition or he may pour out his improvisations, but in either case he has but one aim, which he keeps steadily before him, and is conscientious and single-minding in fulfilling.

That aim is to give forth what he has within him ; and from his very earnestness it comes to pass that, whatever be the splendour of his diction or the harmony of his periods, he has with him the charm of an incommunicable simplicity. He writes passionately, because he feels keenly ; forcibly, because he conceives vividly ; he sees too clearly to be vague; he is too serious to be otiose; he can analyse his subject, and therefore he is rich ; he embraces it as a whole and in its parts, and therefore he is consistent ; he has a firm hold of it, and therefore he is luminous. When his imagination wells up, it overflows in ornament ; when his heart is touched, it thrills along his verse. He always has the right word for the right idea, and never a word too much."

In his vast learning, in his entire devotion to the Church which absorbed all his powers and all his attention, in his gifts of oratory and expression he takes us back in thought to St. Augustine, much as he would have shrunk from the comparison. That intense subjectivity which made " his individual soul and the Almighty appear the only two existences in the universe," gave him in literature the root of the matter. The "Dream of Gerontius," so nobly set to music by one of his own faith, is an example of his startling directness in poetry. But there remains a still loftier height of achievement, when the idea has found not only its perfect expression but its perfect music, pulsating with a rhythm which in its rising or its falling strength subtly reproduces the ebb or flow of that dynamic energy of soul to which it corresponds. It is the authentic note of what Matthew Arnold called the grand style. Such a music is found in Newman's finest sentences and paragraphs. They leave one lost in admiration and thrilled with delight. They are not perfect patterns for the student of style, but that is because they fill him with self-loathing, and almost compel him to the resolution never to return to his own bungling efforts while he can listen to the golden language of the master.

As critics have oft lamented, there is no norm of English prose style. Macaulay is a purblind pyrotechnist, a skilled exponent of the Chinese cracker style, Gibbon marches with too leisurely a gait, Bacon is too compressed, Johnson too prolix, De Quincey is either rhapsodising or gossiping or sniggering, Ruskin is too florid, Addison too well-bred, Carlyle too sansculotte. With Burke there is always but a single step from the sublime to the ridiculous and the grotesque, Pater burns with too " hard and gemlike a flame." So might we range through the gorgeous gallery of our prose-writers, finding some defect in each and all. We will not claim for Newman a position above and beyond these great names, but he can combine Swiftian directness with almost Baconic terseness, he can soar in a Ruskinian rapture without a strident shriek at the spirit of the age or a petulant grimace at his critics, he can be as inspired as Carlyle, but he works in Parian marble, not in rough-hewn granite, he has the aloofness and classicism of Landor without his ferocity. It is good to think as we linger over the " effects " which Newman's master-hand knew so well how to conjure from the instrument of language, that the music of his own life ever became calmer and more melodious towards the end, that that beautiful serenity which is more and more marked in the later portraits, was a true symbol of a mind attuned in ever more perfect harmony to things both human and divine, and that his own life in its latter peace was a strain of rare and richest beauty which found its culmination only in that passage which he ever looked for and fitly described in his own epitaph, " ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem " from shadows and semblances to the truth.

MR BERESFORD'S COUNTERPOINT*

1919

Homer, Aristophanes, Euripides, Newman, Meredith, Ibsen, Mr. J. D. Beresford, why this portentous anti-climax? There is an artistic reason. Have you, fair reader, never noted the skilled photographer when he "takes" the Theseion, or the Parthenon, St. Peter's, Rome, or our own St. Paul's, how cunningly he intrudes a human figure however puny, however dwarfed in seeming? Such is the present function of Mr. Beresford. He gives us scale; by his aid, we, like his own Jacob Stahl, will "stretch out beyond the limits of this little world," and "reach out towards the eternal values."

We have seen in "George Meredith Revisited"† how meaningless may be an adjective, how perplexing are a bookman's epithets. A tale due to the pulp merchant in nine months is acclaimed with praise excessive for a masterpiece. How many novelists, escape the eulogy of being able, convincing, effective, striking, or at the very worst are at least adjudged "suitable for the holidays" or the railway-carriage, or, most perfect exemplar of damnation by faint praise, are pronounced "good specimens of the second-rate shocker?"‡ One is drowned in a welter of adjectives, and the lavish panegyrics of expansive advertisements seem, by some compositor's caprice, to have migrated into the reviewer's columns.

But criticism must not disdain the contemporary; it must devise its tests even for "best-sellers." It must not leave the field to burlesque imitators who speak with tongue in cheek, or to impecunious Bohemians who, reduced almost to their last cigarette, scribble a hasty eulogy for a few honest shillings. Now, as much as ever, do we need a Dunciad, if only in the interests of the more skilled practitioners. Criticism should be as ready to deal with Mr. Rupert Brooke or Mr. Compton Mackenzie as with an Elizabethan or an Eighteenth Century man. It must be a living voice, a potent utterance. Delightful as it ever is to abide with the classic, to hold converse with the comfortably assured of immortality, one must be content sometimes to act as policeman rather than as acolyte. If a host of ill-accredited invade the turn-stiles of the Elysian Fields, one must demand their tickets of admission or good current coin. Not all who call Lord, Lord, shall enter the Kingdom of Literature.

There are bad books of all kinds, biographical, historical, scandalous, and topical, but the easiest of all bad books to publish is a novel. The novel is the most sovereign remedy outside the pharmacopœia. It will exhilarate us, harrow us, make our flesh creep, and, best of all, send us into a doze. There is much more indiscrimination in novel-writing than elsewhere, and, perhaps in consequence, much more indiscriminate reviewing. It is impossible that more than a tithe of the novels which issue from the press should be adequately reviewed. The jaded reviewer ever rebels against that damnable custom by which, in defiance of the laws of gestation, novels are brought to birth in six months. He expects novels to be *not too long*—not 900 pages like *Joan and Peter*—to be simply

* "God's Counterpoint," by J. D. Beresford. Collins 6/- net.

† Pp. 3-15.

‡ These phrases are all culled from reputable journals.

written, in no Meredithian style, to be reasonably but not meticulously grammatical. If these requirements are fulfilled, a hasty canter through alone is needful.

But the careful critic never *will* be rushed. True, great work has often been achieved at a high pressure, the mind raised to a high pitch has often pitted itself against a vast task resolved to call no truce until the deed is done, but fine criticism cannot deal with half a dozen volumes in a week. A careful critic *must* pick and choose, he can sample only a few things out of many, he *must* take them at a venture, limit himself to them. Let us then venture on a dip into the bran pie. We plunge a hand in; out it comes with " God's Counterpoint "

We might have fared far worse. Mr. J. D. Beresford is a Triton amongst the minnows, well spoken of not only by his publisher but by his reviewers. He is among the most in vogue of the half-yearly novelists. He has a nimble pen and from it have proceeded " The Early History of Jacob Stahl," " The Mountains of the Moon," " W. E. Ford," a somewhat sloppy educational tractate—biography, " The House in Demetrius Road," etc., etc., and as a crown of all " God's Counterpoint."

" God's Counterpoint " is the story of a Puritan who hated all things sexual and tried to banish them from his life, with baneful consequences. Philip Maning spent his boyhood under the yoke of a stern Victorian father whose favourite word was " Don't." Philip goes to Dulwich College, where his career was entirely uneventful save that he sometimes had queer sensations in passing through the tunnel under Herne Hill station, and once had an eerie experience in the fields near Croxted Road, his first contact with the beastly. Not being clever enough to win a scholarship at the 'Varsity, he goes into the business of a publisher named Wing, whose speciality is Purity. Maning hates all women, or as it is discovered later, " he loves women too much, and is afraid." However at Wing's he is brought into contact with Evelyn Lang, the business-like daughter of a Dean whom he had once met in odd circumstances, and becomes engaged to her. The physical side of marriage is repulsive to him, but he marries Evelyn and has a son. His rigorousness develops, he drifts apart from his wife, he sinks into an abnormal state, is visited by neuralgia, indigestion, and sleepnessness. He is roused at length by the visit of Evelyn's cousin Hélène, the wife of a Californian millionaire and a true Parisienne. Evelyn had by now resolved to leave Philip, but Hélène, who claims to understand him better, renders that course unnecessary. She elopes with him. The change does Philip good, his eyes are opened, a miracle is performed. " I was a pathological case all right. I don't deny that. But I know that I'm cured." He leaves the lady from Paris (and California) within three weeks, and within nine is discussing the matter quite coolly with Evelyn at Seaford. " But will you always feel *that ?* " she asked, and the tears that had welled into her eyes, began to overflow. So when the novel is beginning to wax exciting, Mr. Beresford, who is nothing if not contrapuntal, writes his coda, for the *vox humana*.

Such is the outline of the story. It plainly is insufficient in itself. It casts no light upon the most difficult of all questions, why one work is a sublime success, another but a dismal failure, why some things appeal to all as great poetry, others serve only to line trunks, why one novel endures, and another is waste paper within the year. Comparisons are odious. Yet comparisons may help us to some understanding of Mr. Beresford's trength and weakness.

MR BERESFORD'S COUNTERPOINT

Once when Queen Victoria was still youthful, and the Albert Memorial was as yet not, there was a novelist. He wrote fervent poems which won lavish praise from another fervent poet, and aged 31, he published a novel which George Eliot admired, which made Carlyle declare its author to be no fool, and which *The Times* reviewed. He continued to write novels, and to publish, at his own expense, poems. But for some thirty years he became less and less popular with every book he wrote, and when he died all connoisseurs acclaimed him as a classic. He had his own views about novel writing, he used to walk the country—he was a great pedestrian—meditating over his characters month after month till he knew them by heart. He was so great in intellectual gifts that he too often was obscure (some whispered designedly obscure), and he flattered his readers only by giving them his best. In a recent appreciation of Meredith a writer with the initials J.D.B.—it is an interesting coincidence that Mr. Beresford's are the same—avers that the world has not leisure to read Meredith. Let us try to see how it is that the world has time to read Mr. Beresford but not to read Meredith.

Greatness in literature can perhaps be summed up in two phrases, vividness of sympathy and intensity of imagination.* The exigencies of the half-yearly novel do not, probably, permit its producers to spend much time musing over characters or working over refractory sections in the manner of the "sedulous ape."† That Mr. Beresford pondered long and laboriously over this theme, that he worked himself into a white heat, that he wrote about Maning because he simply must, that he laboured like Newman over his "Apologia" in grievous stress of brain and heart, "constantly in tears, and constantly crying out with distress" is scarcely credible. Yet though "God's Counterpoint" was probably written *currente calamo*‡ there are no signs of scamped workmanship. Mr. Beresford is undoubtedly interested in Philip Maning. But interested though Mr. Beresford may have been, we are inclined to think that his interest starts from the wrong point. Maning is rather a lay figure who illustrates certain doctrines of psychologists than real flesh and blood. Mr. Beresford is engaged rather in working out a thesis than in limning an enduring portrait. And his thesis is garnished with ideas taken from psychological treatises so very up-to-date that they must needs in twenty years become out-of-date. And Mr. Beresford's manner never does him justice. Its worst example is "W. E. Ford," a mass of windy talk which overwhelms the reader, but gives him no very clear conception of the alleged great educationist. Mr. Beresford is incurably voluble; he talks at his readers, he fixes them with his glittering eye. We have all met him in a hotel lounge, on a golf course, or certainly in a railway carriage. He has given us his views on most things, he has poured out his flood of sloppy talk, interminable, confusing, diversified, sometimes interesting, but always too long. He knows enough to dazzle an ignorant person—his own Jacob Stahl would have listened agape if he had met him in a Bloomsbury boarding house—but the older hands are wary of him. It is hardly likely that Mr. Beresford is so hopelessly superficial as his "chat" suggests, but at his worst he is an appalling example of what the conversational style of criticism or delineation may be.

* The phrases are almost synonymous.

† See the "Vailima Letters" of Stevenson for information as to his methods.

‡ In case J. D. B. should read this essay, *currente calamo* means literally "with a flowing or running pen."

So far from impressing upon us that he is profoundly versed in the lore of human nature, he merely makes us think that he has got up, and none too well, the latest textbook on Freud.

But more of this anon. For the present let our first view proceed. A great book embodies a great personality. No one will make such claim of greatness for Mr. Beresford. He is nothing of a poet, he has nothing of the ardour of the Elizabethans, he is not passionate—the present age believes in no such folly—he has no piercing imagination, he lacks pathos, he is intellectual but not with the intellectuality of a First Class Honoursman. He has no gift of style, no skilful turns of phrase, though, with exceptions to be noted afterward, he writes in general lucidly, and avoids slovenliness. Wit is not for him, and there are perhaps two humorous touches in this novel. He cannot write a great descriptive passage, such as will occur in any novel of Meredith's, he cannot thrill, and he cannot portray characters which really grip. His work is not a real harmony, a creation stamped with its creator's image, and—most damning fact of all—he lacks atmosphere. He is diligent enough in his way. He knows, like Eric Stahl, how difficult it is to formulate a characteristic mode of expression, that one must study above all Flaubert, and " for construction,* Daudet, Balzac . . . . a long list." But though he has studied contemporary life in all its details closely, he seems always to be dependent on the lore of his note-book. He bears upon his forehead the brand of mediocrity.

In spite of Horace† there is no reason why mediocrities should not write novels. In any case it were better that mediocrity rather than abject incompetence should write them. " God's Counterpoint " interests though it does not hold. It is not badly put together, and is in this respect illustrative of the considerable amount of intelligence, industry, and even thoughtfulness which goes to the making of the contemporary novel. It is a mistake to read it twice, but on the first reading one is interested and even attracted. But when one returns to " God's Counterpoint " one does not find, as one finds with the great novels, that there are ever fresh points of interest and delight, or that there are qualities which can give it an abiding permanence. It leads one even to throw out as a definition of a first-rate novel that it is one which bears twice reading.

So we must conclude that " God's Counterpoint " lacks a poetic conception of humanity, a sustained power leading up to a crisis, is for the most part lacking in both wit and humour, is without the magic of style,‡ devoid of skilfulness of phrase,§ shows no vivid imagination revealing itself in striking delineations, is without the fecund inspiration which makes the greatest achievements of literature an abiding marvel.‖ In justice

* As regards construction, from the merely technical point of view the turns of the narrative where Philip leaves Evelyn instead of Evelyn leaving Philip, and where Philip interviews Wood and then Evelyn are ingenious. The fundamental falsity of the latter scene will be pointed out later.

† Gods, and men, and booksellers agree
To place their ban on middling poetry.

‡ Compare the sketches of Philip and Wing, p. 28, with two chance paragraphs of Meredith. The result will be confusion for the admirers of Mr. Beresford.

§ The nearest approach to a phrase is " an Adonis with the face of a young priest." Compare that with " a dainty rogue in porcelain," " a dashing racing cutter," " he has a leg " and all the inimitable profusion of the " Egoist."

‖ See Sainte Beuve, " Essay on Molière " for some excellent remarks on this point.

it must be said that " God's Counterpoint " nowhere lays claim to any of these qualities, that it is not often pretentious in style or effort, that it has no glaring weaknesses. But the fact remains that if we award " The Egoist " or " Evan Harrington " with all their faults an alpha plus we must award " God's Counterpoint," if we desire to press on to the " eternal values," a very minus gamma. This assertion we must illustrate in various ways.

First as to subject. Novels are concerned with the portrayal of human nature, and the more profound and precise the knowledge, the more effective may the novel be. Nevertheless it is probably true that novelists should *not* read handbooks on psychology. The jargon and terminology of the science of mind may make a great display, but the novelist is not a professor of psychology and his very glibness in talking of inhibition may be an artistic damage. Moreover he has not to deal with the pathology of mind. He is not a specialist in morbid disorders ; indeed morbid cases have merely a clinical interest.

Again, all symbolism is dangerous. It generally breaks down, but it is rarely so bewildering as in " God's Counterpoint." In the key passage of the book we are told that " all apparent discords and ugliness are but accentuations of the eternal rhythm ; the necessary beat of an undertone,—God's Counterpoint." Truly the counterpoint of the Almighty has not yet found a place in the treatises of Rockstro and Kitson. Counterpoint, the counterpoint of Palestrina, the purest form, one has learnt to regard as an art which carefully avoids discord. Counterpoint. as one was taught long ago, is in its salient feature " the independent conception of the parts not only in melodic curve but also in time value " (Kitson p. 7). " It is the art of writing one series of notes—or to speak with more technical correctness, one Part, against another; and this whether the given part be placed in the Treble, in the Bass, or in a middle position between the two." Counterpoint is an additional part or parts written against some given subject, a Canto Fermo. God's Counterpoint would therefore seem to be an extra part written by the Almighty against a Canto Fermo supplied by—the Devil ? This is musical Manicheanism. But it is not all. " All apparent discords and ugliness are but accentuations of the eternal rhythm." Here, it seems, we pass from Counterpoint to Harmony. Why should the accentuation of a rhythm, one vainly asks, affect a harmony ? Harmony depends upon the relation that notes have to one another as members of a (harmonic) series generated from a note called its fundamental tone ; rhythm is the movement of these notes. Besides being the accentuation of an eternal rhythm, apparent discords are the necessary beat of an undertone. This undertone, if we must hazard a conjecture is a kind of bourdon, a sort of pedal point in which the bass note remains constant through a succession of harmonies, of one of which it does, and of others it does not, form a part (Prout p. 237). The " beats " cause more mystification. They are not, probably, the " beats " which are produced when notes out of tune are played together. However, in this ingenious sentence Mr. Beresford has paid homage to acoustics, harmony, and counterpoint, at once, with the following startling results.*

* No wonder that Evelyn when she heard all this scimble-scamble " cried out his name as if she were hurt, but when he made a movement towards her, she turned and held up her hand. ' It bewilders me. I'm not sure that it doesn't rather frighten me . . . . It's shuddery.' " Poor Evelyn !

MR BERESFORD'S COUNTERPOINT

All apparent discords are in all cases
(1) accentuations of the eternal rhythm
(2) necessary beats of an undertone
(3) God's Counterpoint.
Accentuations of the eternal rhythm are (at any rate sometimes)
(1) the necessary beats of an undertone, and of course
(2) God's Counterpoint.
The necessary beat of an undertone is
God's Counterpoint

We hope that Mr. Beresford will collect some more examples of the divine counterpoint and send them to the Principal of the Royal Academy of Music for analysis.*

Mr. Beresford is brimful of musical lore. On p. 63 we find Philip devising a prelude to the sonata of his relations with Miss Lang, a proceeding which purists would regard as an artistic monstrosity. The prelude was pitched in too high a key (apparently F. major in alt.). "After the first passage the thing went dismally flat," a pun being possibly intended. Philip's difficulties in dealing with his extraordinary instrument were increased through his foolish choice of F. major, which, as every novice knows, "fairly bristles with sharps."† Miss Lang prudently did not attempt to "establish" the key but unfortunately "established" his error by seeking to drag Philip at once into the "comparative leisure of E. flat." Very fittingly this premature attempt at modulation into a very distantly related key broke down, and naturally the prelude "went excruciatingly out of tune." We do not like to talk of inhibition to Mr. Beresford, but we would beg him whenever he feels moved in future to resort to musical imagery, to inhibit himself, even though his dreams should be disturbed in consequence.

But we wish to give a comprehensive view of Mr. Beresford's book, and we will therefore turn for a while to some of the things which attracted us in the first reading. Here is part of an allegory which is pleasingly, almost charmingly, written, until we come to a "clear ecstatic communion" whatever that may be.

"A deep shadow suddenly lay over the brightness of our garden; the colour died from the flowers; the sweet intercourse of our thought was broken; and I knew that while you still walked beside me, you were no longer mine. Then you turned to me and asked the gift that I dreaded, and the shadow on the garden deepened until in the darkness I could see nothing but your eyes that looked at me with doubt and a little fear, and yet with a desire for sacrifice; for the sacrifice of all the magic purity and marvel of our love. But I could not answer that desire. I knew that no recompense could avail me for all that I must lose if, only for an instant, I ceased to honour you with the perfect chastity of adoration and love that is the best and truest thing in life that I have to offer. And, perhaps, your eyes saw deep into my soul, for presently the shadow began to lift, and in a little I saw your face, sweet and content as it had always been. And the colour burnt

* Those who are curious to investigate further might consult Kitson, "The Art of Counterpoint," Rockstro, "The Rules of Counterpoint," and Prout, "Harmony its Theory and Practice." A further contribution to the theory of God's Counterpoint is Mr. Beresford's dictum that ugliness so-called is necessary to the harmony, "something that completes the structure of the melody." (p. 364).

† It must have been a slight mitigation that all these sharps were flat!

clear again in all the leaping freshness of the flowers ; the image of the waiting god had vanished ; and once more we walked in the clear, ecstatic communion of love and understanding."

The next page contains an admirable piece of description, full of " atmosphere " for once, though it deals only with so homely a thing as the posting of a letter.

" After that he sealed his letter and went out and posted it. As it fell with a little click into the pillarbox, he became aware of a new serenity. A soft air stirred in the darkness of the night. The widely spaced lamps down the tunnel of the dip towards Denmark Hill led his inquiry into the invisible distance with an effect of regular soothing rhythm. He stood and followed the line of dwindling points to and fro, diagonally from pavement to pavement, until the last faint speck fell to the plane of the road's horizon. It seemed to him that in this smooth regularity diminishing along some magic curve of perfect progression, he could read the secret of happiness, of peace and comfort of an ordered life. He had a sense of calm that was transcendental in its immensity ; a sense of passing by a regular and ordained deliberation through an eternity from which the very principle of effort had been for ever excluded.

He was not disturbed when the postman came out of the distance with firm even steps, and cleared the pillarbox to the accompaniment of a musical clink of keys, a little murmuring chatter of collected letters, and the last firm chord of a closing metal door. Philip, from under the black shadow of the tall paling, watched his disappearance, beating a diminuendo of retreat down the alley of the faintly lit perspective."

Mr. Beresford is not a Meredith in his descriptive power, but he has a pleasing nocturne of evening seen from Torrington Square, when " the sweet pale lamps of Heaven came to keep watch above the copper glare of London." He sits " until the sombre glow in the south-west died with the recession of the great human tide of pleasure-seekers, until the sound of tinkling hansoms and clattering hoofs had ceased, and his exquisite mood of tranquillity was taken up by the broad enclosing sweep of night." But this, and the passages above quoted, are just the passages we fear, which Mudie's clients skip.

Humour rarely visits Mr. Beresford. We can recollect but one example, which indeed is diverting. Mr. Blenkinsop Senior has that jewel beyond price, a ringing tenor voice, and can even sing a tenor part, with such effect that the school children sitting near in church sing the tenor part too. This is embarrassing, above all when the choir are singing " Who givest all " and a worshipper is hurrying out of Church during the offertory.*

The character of Philip though not drawn with a master's vigour, is not without interest. It is a strange, nervous, rather morbid type, which would not infrequently develop religious mania. Maning's progression from the quite ordinary, decent-minded boy who shied at anything " beastly " into the narrow bigot, not an ascetic (because the word suggests a man in high spiritual training) but a fanatic who makes his shyness into a religion, does not strike one as unnatural. But it is strange that after he has married such a charming and intelligent woman as Evelyn Lang, and had a son by her,

* Peter Maning rebuking Philip, aged seven, for reading Shakespeare, is also interesting. After all, as Philip contended, he did understand " And Suffolk dies by pirates," and could read blank verse. Here the author has got hold of a point profoundly true. A master of irony like Meredith would have made vast entertainment out of Philip's embrace of Evelyn just after his rebuke of Mr. Wing, p. 106. But the opportunity is missed.

he should lapse into his inhibitions. Mr. Beresford is here voyaging through some of the gloomiest regions of the mind, and, Freud or no Freud, he does not fully succeed in tracking out the spiritual development which led to Philip's absconding with Hélène. Yet so far we would be inclined to concede that the progression of the plot has been logical and skilful. It *is* credible that a man whose soul has been, consciously and unconsciously, the arena in which has been fought a long battle between inhibitions and strong natural impulses, at length should feel the strain terrific, and yield suddenly to the devil's temptation, as he would call it, to fling himself into the abyss of sensualism. The annals of monachism are only too full of similar tales, of war against ghostly perils, and hideous delirium, and paroxysms of frenzy.* Nor is it surprising that after three weeks of Hélène, Philip has had enough of his "fellow devil." But what is amazing is that after a few more weeks devoted, in the precincts of Bloomsbury, to the benign and pacifying influences of Shelley, Keats, Swinburne, *Byron*, and Browning, we find him, not writhing in the flames of Hell, but clothed and in his right mind at Seaford explaining to Evelyn in his most Beresfordian manner what has happened. The novel ends where the real complications would in life have begun. What an over-powering—and more probable—conclusion might have been wrought if Maning, horror-stricken at his falseness, since his hand "like the base Indian threw a pearl away richer than all his tribe," had flung himself before a railway train, or drowned himself on Seaford front? But the tragic force of the creator of Richard Feverel was never given to Mr. Beresford.

Mr. Beresford manifests the tendency of most modern novelists to poke about in life's dustbins, in the expectation of lighting upon some treasure trove. He deals here with a subject which might be very nasty, and with a hero who has a diseased mind. In justice to Mr. Beresford it must be said that there is nothing beastly in this description of a hater of the beastly. We are mercifully spared the Leicester Square element almost entirely. There are in "God's Counterpoint" things not pleasant, but nothing offensive. Though Mrs. Grundy and Mr. Bowdler could assert with reason that there are passages which if read out publicly to a mixed audience would make many uncomfortable and even provoke hisses, we cannot agree that the author has treated the subject in a suggestive way.

There is not much interplay of character; modern novelists avoid the large canvas. Philip and Evelyn, Philip's father and mother, George Wood, Hélène, Mr. Wing, the Blenkinsops, constitute the *mise en scène*, and not all these are fully drawn. Wood, the schoolboy friend who goes into the city, and becomes the "average, sensual man" helps by contrast to bring out the strangeness of Philip's mentality.† Hélène is not laboured at. The other personages would be merely sketches in passing in a novel of

* See Lecky, History of European Morals, vol. II, p. 116, seq.

† The conversation between Wood and Maning when Wood enlightens Maning on the meaning of marriage is well conceived. To our passages on p. 92, may be added the following which contains a really fine idea. "And deep down in Wood's being there stirred the power of a response that is secret, the birthright of most men; the response to an ideal of purity and asceticism; a symptom of the great religious element which even in the savage finds expression in a respect for chastity. For it is as if God experimented; as if the seed of that ideal were sown in every man, in the hope that here and there it might develope into the finest flower of sainthood. The ideal has no correspondence with the modesty and reluctance of women." p. 169.

Meredith or of Thackeray. And though the author's notebook is always in his hand, and he can talk learnedly of the physostigmine treatment of tetanus, or of aphasia, we get very little descriptive detail. A Lyons tea shop at 7.55 p.m., the view from Sydenham over London, the entrance hall of a big London Club, these are the biggest things attempted, and they are the work of a neat journeyman rather than of a master. The dialogue is just a transcript of modern talk at its poorest and washiest, and does not interest. The only discussion in which there is any fencing is that between Philip and Wood, when the latter refuses at first to tell Philip his wife's address. But though we might not have conceived Philip sighing patiently over his friend's obstinacy, we could all write most of the stuff which appears in the discussion, " What the hell do you come to *me* for ? " and " God knows why I don't wring your bloody neck." To do him justice Mr. Beresford rarely attempts pretentious writing, save when the divine counterpoint is concerned.* There is one feeble echo of Meredith ; it is the last paragraph but one. " She knew that she had exposed the last tragedy of human love, the magnificently aspiring ; a sempiternal ecstasy limited by the feeble devotions of a physical expression." A reward might well be offered for a lucid translation into English of this portentous string of abstract nouns. The ordinary reader (who has not time to read Meredith) has no time to puzzle out such conundrums.

And now for Mr. Beresford's pet theory. He is fully abreast with the modern movement in education, and has even attended the New Ideals Conference. It is no doubt profoundly true that children should be enjoined to do rather than not to do. The Victorian parent, not so grim a person as he has been represented, doubtless carried inhibition too far, but he produced such fine fellows as ourselves, who know the latest discoveries in psycho-analysis and have read about Freud. The Victorian parent was not so truculently ferocious as the elder Mr. Maning, though he was much of a Philistine, and for all his fury he cowered before Mrs. Grundy. Philip Maning was *not* a typical Victorian child. Let any doubter read in the back volumes of Punch.

To demonstrate his thesis Mr. Beresford naturally takes an exaggerated, if not impossible, instance. It was not Peter Maning who made Philip nervous, sensitive, at twenty-seven still not master of himself. Peter was not nervous and sensitive—much the reverse—and if Philip is so overstrung that he cannot look a woman employee in the face but must keep his eyes fixed on his table, if he cannot concentrate on his work when dictating business letters to this lady clerk (all of which is well rendered by Mr. Beresford) we cannot hold the Victorian Age responsible either for Philip's weakness or his bad dreams and aborted tendencies. Philip is a very bad pathological case, as he discovers in the " Coda " to " God's Counterpoint." His story has admittedly " no value as propaganda for preaching a new way of life. The conditions that led to Philip's enlightenment were not *typical.*" It is not a safe plan to do evil that good may come, and it is probably rare for sin to bring blessing instead of punishment. The author perforce admits this,

* But we should like to know what is " the resonant insistance of a perfunctory call to worship " (p. 126) and " generative tickling " (p. 127). May we never meet any " ferous beasts " (p. 259). If only Mr. Beresford had talked of God's Harmony instead of God's Counterpoint, things would have been better. It is entirely true that it is from the most clashing discords that the richest effects of Harmony are produced, and that the art of Music has progressed by extending its province over wider tracts of discord. But how tame God's Harmony sounds as a title beside God's Counterpoint.

and will not defend Philip's act " apart from the idiosyncracy of his character." Philip tries to drive one set of ideas out of his mind, he confines them in one small corner, but they are out and active at all moments. He lives in monastic loneliness, not that he is a hermit, but he makes himself into a monastery from which, as at Mount Athos, everything that deals with sex is excluded, and like the monachists of the Middle Ages he pays the penalty to disregarded Nature.* Even a kiss fills him with remorse.† The forbidden thing has a horrible fascination for him, and when the forbidden thing is incarnate in a voluptuous Parisian, he flings himself into a kind of suicide, the worst sin he knew. He has beastly dreams of great white ewes and other things, which might well have been left to remain in his diseased imagination, he has neuralgia, indigestion, and is sleepless, he solemnly declares " we must be positive in virtue, not negative in virtue," and feels that he must make a scene with Hélène, who has just come to Sutton-Parslow on a visit. There are all the symptoms of an approaching brain-storm, and when the climax comes, surprising as it is, it is not so astounding as it seems at first sight. But if we are to condemn the seventies it must not be because they produced Philip Maning.

Maning's capital error then was that he could not get the right view of woman. He is not wrong in romanticising her, but he is wrong and foolish in ignoring the fundamentals of nature. " If there is anything unpleasant in the world, you shut your eyes to it, and pretend it does not exist." That is not the way either to write successful novels or to be a success in life. Maning cannot realise that " women are human beings just as much as men," and is shocked at Evelyn's insistence on it. If he will not learn this truth from Evelyn, he has to learn it from Hélène. But if Mr. Beresford is seeking now to demonstrate this, the time is past. An age which has seen women wearing trousers, smoking and using cuss words, tossing off their glasses of kummel and Benedictine, needs no further enlightenment.

But Mr. Beresford's collapse comes in his last chapter. Neither he nor his hero can escape this difficulty. If Philip has learnt to understand life, if a miracle has happened, as we are assured it has, it is due to a Circe from Paris. " Whatever he has now to offer Evelyn was merely the result of what some other woman had taught him." Evelyn contemptuously announces to him her forgiveness before she has heard his explanation. It is as well. She does not understand. " It's all too horribly like a miracle, or a Lourdes cure, or something," as she not very lucidly says. The reconciliation is doubtless " chiefly for Noel's sake." One would like to read the next volume of Mr. and Mrs. Maning's matrimonial history, the life " begun again in new circumstances with a fresh circle of acquaintances." Evelyn still, unfortunately, remains, in Philip's magniloquent phrase, his " ultimate symbol of perfection." " God's Counterpoint " shows that married men and novelists alike should avoid symbols, ultimate or otherwise.

Such is the latest work of a novelist who generally has a good press, and who in this case was generally considered to have surpassed himself. One is led to moralise upon the modern novel in general. Modern novelists achieve success with a determination

* Is his strangeness due to his diet ? In one of his dreams he contemplates a supper of " fruit and salad," a truly monstrous conception, or is it merely a fruit salad of a Beresfordian hendiadys ?

† This again is quite un-Victorian. There is no reason to believe that there was less kissing in the Victorian age than in any other. See Dickens *passim*

worthy of a better cause. They are laboriously conscientious in some ways, they are painfully determined, many of them, to study Flaubert and the other French craftsmen, they keep big notebooks, and they laboriously construct, but they cannot hide from the observer the fact that all this elaborate apparatus conceals a second-rate mind. There are a host of people who have developed a certain talent for writing novels, but there is scarcely one particle of genius amongst them all. Our moderns prove that a talent can write one good novel, but that it takes a genius to repeat the feat. Genius can indeed repeat itself indefinitely. And so we have the oft repeated spectacle of a writer succeeding with his first novel and then, owing to his limitations of talent, and partly to the exigencies of novel-writing as a branch of commerce, (the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches), merely treading less happily the same hackneyed round. Mr. Beresford is a case in point. " Jacob Stahl," published in 1911, is in its setting, its power of imagination, its general richness, decidedly superior to " God's Counterpoint " published in 1917. Mr. Beresford is doubtless more fluent now—indeed he is appallingly so—his hand is more practised, but the native spark of originality has gone out. He has won his vogue, and nothing said here will affect his livelihood, for " the English novel-reading public, whatever its failings, is as faithful as a child. It does not run after new methods and new ideas. It infinitely prefers the old stories and the familiar manner." Mr. Beresford will still mistake fluency for afflatus, he will still write novels in which the key passage is balderdash. And what Goethe said of a far greater then Mr. Beresford will still be true of him, " sobald er reflectirt, ist er ein Kind." The public, being an ass, will still believe that F. Major is full of sharps, and after Mr. Beresford has gone on, in a later novel, to explain why E. major is leisurely, may he proceed to the finding of that Lost Chord which proved such a mine of wealth to Sir Arthur Sullivan.

Modern novels nearly always leave a nasty taste in the mouth. We plead guilty to a certain sympathy with Philip Maning. " Why *are* men and women " (in novels) " so beastly?" why do they invert Philip's faulty method, and, extremists themselves, insist on seeing nothing but what is unpleasant in the world, pretending that nothing lofty does exist? Truly men and women must, to use Blenkinsop's view in another sense, reads novels to forget real life. The hero of the modern novel, who is nearly always a member of the professional classes, generally enters upon his education in life by going down Piccadilly and then turning up Sinister Street, where all the *bona robas* of the district contribute to the widening of his experience. The hero makes an egregious fool of himself, like Jacob Stahl, and consoles himself by the thought of his infinite superiority to his friends. " Each of them was generous in his own way, capable of fine emotions, no doubt, but they were all wrapped in the small affairs of life ; their outlook was very limited. Was any one of them adding to the knowledge of the world ? could any one of them echo responsively to the boom of the earth-note ?" Such characterisations are a libel upon a class which has quite its share, if not more than its share, of respectability, restraint, and intelligence. Jacob Stahl, who has wasted his money and his time down Sinister Street, may dupe himself, if he pleases with the thought that he has finer ideals and finer sensibilities, but he is only fit at the end of all his experiences to be a third-rate novelist. As for those who, like Eric Stahl and Bradley, prefer work to dreaming, realities to self-delusion, genuine accomplishments to vague velleities, if they can achieve

some honest piece of work in their generation it does not matter a tinker's curse whether they are responsive to the boom of the earth-note or not.

What then is the conclusion of the whole matter? First that it is expedient not to read a contemporary novel more than once if you wish to retain your admiration for it. We must confess that our first judgment upon "God's Counterpoint," formed mainly in the course of a journey from Paddington to Gloucester, was more favourable than that of the second reading. Even the symbolism, though confusing, was not laid bare in its full nakedness, but seemed vaguely profound not profoundly vague, possibly because the accentuation of the eternal rhythm was masked by the undertone of the G.W.R., the engine-driver's counterpoint. And our second conclusion is that Mr. Beresford, if we judge him as he would no doubt desire, by the highest standards, has not yet grasped the "ultimate symbol of perfection." He has his notebook in his hand, untiringly he pours out a flood of undistinguished English, but he cannot catch a grotesque like Dickens, he cannot philosophise like Thackeray, he cannot describe an intellectual like Meredith or a rustic like Hardy. He cannot paint female characters like George Eliot, or reproduce a small circle faithfully like Anthony Trollope, nor can he give us the freedom of the sea, and that vague sense of the struggle against fate, which so powerfully distinguish the work of Mr. Conrad. Readers will always wish to gaze at, and novelists to reproduce, the fascinating spectacle of human life, and even an unskilled practitioner contrives to fix some of the glory and romance of it in his pages, and to light up some of the chambers of the imagination for his readers. But "non cuivis homini contingit adire Corintho."* The novel is now a great art form, perhaps the greatest in modern literature. In a striking passage Meredith compares a character to a "cathedral organ foully handled by demons." In reading "God's Counterpoint" we are often reminded of a cathedral organ, not given over to demons, but delivered for the nonce to an "improver" to try his prentice hand thereon. And this is, so far, the only musical symbol arising out of "God's Counterpoint" which will be found technically, and in actual fact, to be unassailable.

* "It's a long, long way to Tipperary," and to literary mastership.

THE SMOKE NUISANCE

1919

Every age has its own foibles, its weaknesses, its besetting sin, and every age is diverted at the fashions of its predecessors, smiles patronisingly at the folly of its poor dear predecessors, and benignly assumes that *it* will never be *démodé*. We must admit that the Twentieth Century is a remarkably clever century, even though the greatest achievement of its many inventions has so far been to set a continent on fire, and well-nigh bring the world to ruin. Yet even this enlightened age can hardly hope to have escaped entirely those little ironies which so divert the imps of comedy above. I propose to examine briefly one of the most extraordinary crazes which have ever affected mankind in its slow progress from one phase of civilisation to another.

Modern Industrialism has in its marvellous developments continued to produce much smoke. Our great towns are not complete without their murk and smoky pall, save when a comprehensive strike has given the air Sabbatic clearness. But Industrialism has not yet learned to consume its smoke. High-souled enthusiasts combining æsthetic aspirations with applied science chaunt their prophetic strains of a day when our atmosphere shall be clear, our rivers silvery, our skies of an Italian blue. It may be so. Our miner brothers may convert us, when their modest demands have been conceded, to the view that smoke is wasteful, unhealthy, and a symptom of industrial inefficiency. The world will solemnly agree that smoke shall be no more, will solemnly enact that this pestiferous nuisance must be abated—and then the world, satisfied in conscience of a good deed done, will straightway proceed to light another pipe and smoke its strongest brand. Having cleared its atmosphere it will defile its study, its living-room, and even its bedroom, by the fumes of the " fragrant weed."

The history of smoking is a longish story, though the practice, for one who looks at human things by centuries, is still a new-fangled innovation. Whatever anticipations and analogues the delver into customary lore may find, the habit dates to all intents from the time when a certain West country Buccaneer (who was also a courtier, adventurer, and a man of genius) discovered the fumiferous properties of a certain plant, and brought home in his shiphold together with potatoes—a happier gift—a quantity of tobacco. The discovery attracted the gallants and popinjays of the time, and tobacco was smoked or " drunk " in pipes. Smoking spread amongst all classes of society (and in all European countries) though there is no evidence that the habit was universal or deemed essential to manliness. The pipe was thought a somewhat vulgar thing. It was a thing to be banished far from the presence of the gentler sex, a thing associated vaguely with grooms and stables and the pothouse, a practice which many great gentlemen disdained and which, doubtless, many fine gentlemen banned. Novelists, if they deal with contemporary life, are as good guides as any in tracing the history of social usage. There is little in the novelists of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century which suggests that the habit had that hold upon men which it incontestably has now. Did Dr. Johnson smoke ? It is difficult to recall mentions of smoking in Boswell. Cigars and tobacco play a prominent part in the life of Mr. Pendennis ; Dickens tells of the expedient

by which the young gentlemen of Westminster School removed the aroma of tobacco from their persons and in *Bleak House* refers to those " paper cigars," then a novelty, and now the most prominent feature in our daily life. But you may read many pages in Dickens and Thackeray without finding any reference to tobacco, and you will read elsewhere of austere ladies who, like Queen Victoria, banned the weed, and forbade its worship in their houses. Even in a Modern like Meredith you will find clear indications of the dubious position which smoking held. Barons like Romfrey eschew it and dislike it, great ladies banish it from their presence ; it flourishes in Bohemia alone and with Bohemians. The Duke of Wellington, who still ranks amongst our greatest exponents of the art of war, detested the practice, and did his utmost—*tempora mutantur*—to prevent Army Officers from smoking. Mr. Gladstone very rarely smoked, Bishop Westcott, and doubtless many of his episcopal brethren, disliked and avoided smoking. Smoking in public, particularly in anything like formal costume—was considered unworthy of any gentleman. Smoking was in ordinary a relaxation permissible under very definite limits and only in certain places, when the serious work of the day was over. How different matters are now, the contemporary novel, the contemporary play, film, or music-hall revue—and ordinary observation—will show.

In passing judgment upon all things which one dislikes, it is well to seek first to gain a detached view of the matter. Macaulay's New Zealander cannot help us, for the Anzac is as much addicted to the weed as any. A visitor from another planet might assist us, though he, it could be urged, might be unprovided with mouth, and throat, and nasal organ, and therefore doomed to be inappreciative. Let us take then a human being devoid of all experience in tobacco. How amazed, one may aver, would have been Pericles or Socrates, or even Herodotus (whom few things would have surprised) or Cicero, or Marcus Aurelius, or genial Sir Thomas More, could they be transported into a modern city where they might note two men smoking out of every five they met, and where they would observe that the number of minutes spent by their hosts and entertainers in taking smoke into their mouths and lungs passed all counting. The natural impulse of the natural unsophisticated man—if he saw a smoking man—would be much the same as if he saw a smoking chimney, to put the walking conflagration out, and the serving man who promptly douched Sir Walter Raleigh when first he saw him smoking acted in an entirely reasonable way. It is incredible that a hugely preponderant majority of men should pass their free hours, save for those intervals which make the returning " smoke " the more agreeable, in converting themselves into not very efficient chimneys. It is incredible and it is true. The imagination recoils at the thought of Dante having traffic with a cigarette, it is not merely one's historic sense which is shocked at the image of Tacitus with a calumet, Virgil purchasing one half ounce of returns, or St. Paul or St. Augustine trifling with a cigar.

We are in duty bound to hope that the recent War will bring particular nations and the world at large a few steps nearer the millennium. One thing is certain. There has never been any event or series of events in history which has given smoking such a tremendous vogue. A soldier without a cigarette poked away in the corner of his mouth or between his fingers, or stuck over his ear, is a thing unthinkable ; a soldier who smokes not is a contradiction in terms. Heroes, like other people, have hours of leisure, and do

not always use them profitably. And the long spells of idleness which seem the inevitable concomitant of the soldier's life become intolerable unless some opiate is at hand to bring vacancy, to ensure relief from the malady of thought. We have admired the hero, and gratefully recognised all that he has done for us ; we have tried to imitate him. But, being largely unheroical we have failed to emulate him save in one thing. We have made the cigarette a sacramental bond, and many a civilian has endured agonies as he smoked a " Woodbine " on invitation in a train. We have loaded the soldier with almost more " smokes " than he could dispose of, and the feminine portion of us, when " employed "—it is the official term—in Government offices, has succeeded in vindicating the sacred principles of sex equality by consuming cigarettes, during the tea hour (3-5.30 p.m.) and at such other times as was convenient. At the time of writing, the one definite achievement of the war in the region of social matters, beyond dispute and beyond debate, is that smoking is scarcely taboo anywhere. In business offices, in restaurants and dining-rooms (where decency surely forbids), in Parliamentary Committees, in all railway carriages, in any place of resort, in lifts, in Military Hospital Wards, in libraries (greatest of all desecrations), in Y.M.C.A. buildings (which originally started with a strong hostility to smoking), in all these places must those who are fastidious in their sense perceptions resign themselves to the reek of tobacco, more or less poisonous according to the pocket and tastes of the smoker. Even in the Halls and Lecture-rooms of Academus the smoke of the daily sacrifice rises to Nicotine, enthroned now upon Olympian heights with the greatest of the gods. No Church or Chapel organisation could survive which frowned on smoking ; by one congregation it has already been suggested that smoking should be allowed in Church. Few men indeed, were the sacrifice to be demanded, would endure to prefer their religion to their pipe. It is not usual to smoke at funerals, but a clergyman going to give the last words of comfort to a dying man has found the relatives assembled to smoke their kinsman into Eternity. For the hero dispenses with, or is dispensed from, all etiquette. He smokes, it is but a slight exaggeration, anywhere and everywhere, and the only hint of opposition has been that the Railway Executive Committee have put up large placards forbidding smoking in non-smoking carriages, which their servants, doubtless overworked, have had time neither to read nor to enforce.

Man in the present year of grace (the term " man " will often include woman) is a smoking animal. The definition may not be complete or beyond improvement, but it gives man's *differentia* better than any other attempt. The one bond of union betwixt prince and errand-boy, peer and ploughman, sage and sot, is that which is designated by a peculiarly elegant and euphonious term as a " fag." If the pockets of the whole adult male population of England were searched at any given moment, that which the investigator would be most certain of finding would be a cigarette packet. (It is true that this packet would often be empty.) The surest way of winning a stranger's affection or of " breaking the ice " is to offer him a cigarette. If you travel for three or four hours in a railway carriage from North to South, or from East to West, you would soon lose all count should you attempt a census of the number of cigarettes which your fellow-travellers consume. Science has not yet devised a means whereby men may smoke while they sleep or while they feed. To your true smoker a meal is only a necessary but undesirable interlude in the real business of life. In a restaurant, soon as the food and liquid is down the throat,

before the most rapid grace could be recited, the match is struck, the smoke curls upwar d whether companions have finished or not, whether they prefer their viands fumigated or not. Persons will be found smoking, when they are cycling, when they are walking, when they are thinking—if thought and tobacco are compatible—when they are talking to a lady, when they are mending, when they are making love (the true enthusiast will teach his inamorata), when they are driving railway engines or motor-cars, when they are playing golf, in short through all the serious business of life. The smoker is forbidden to smoke while he is manufacturing explosives, but unless he is closely watched he will cheerfully make the venture, and he cannot smoke while he is praying, but prayer (save for more tobacco) is not an exercise much in favour with him. Modern life has its tramme ls, its iron fetters of routine. Man, from the time of Matthew Arnold and earlier, has lamented his hard lot, chafed at life's sick hurry and divided aims, and rightly sought leisure to possess his soul. Mankind will, no doubt, win fuller leisure, perhaps even the possession of its soul, but it will be a safe assertion that, for the generality, self-expression and full self-development only exist, the ego is unshrouded only at those moments, when a man is puffing at pipe, cigar, or cigarette, in those precious minutes when, a vacant Hedonist, he attains the true Nirvana, annihilation of self, and *homo sapiens* becomes merely the extremity of a pipe or cigarette.

Well ! for those who have not gone beneath the yoke, it is, and remains, a mystery, the most gigantic and grotesque instance in human pathology, that they or others have ever had a chance of studying, a mania that is both the result and cause of disordered nerves. It is a form of " doping " which is more respectable than the morphia or cocaine habit, but more dangerous because it is more respectable and more universal ; it is a thraldom, which is not less a thraldom because it is generally submitted to with cheerfulness, and being a thraldom it is not compatible with the fullest mental, moral, or physical fitness. When 98% or so of the adult male population—I do not know whether I am gravely exaggerating the number of non-conformists—not debarred by illness, special prohibition, or residence in prison, are submissive to this thraldom, it is a nuisance, a plague, a national portent. Science, Medical and Eugenic, has feebly censured smoking. A glance through a few Medical Encyclopedias—which have scarcely been prepared by persons of violent prejudices on this matter—will discover a large number of maladies which may be brought on by excessive smoking. The voice of authority clearly declares that smoking for the young and immature is as pernicious a thing as can be, and " grown-ups " have at least told the juvenile that he must not smoke. So has the law of the land. We have received the law by the disposition of the " Children's Charter " and have not kept it.

How is it, we may be asked, that the tobacco habit has lately assumed such vast dimensions ? Partly owing to the strain of a colossal War during which many have sought relief in anything which could " minister to a mind diseased, pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow," partly owing to the general prosperity of the wage-earners, who have no intellectual interests, and must spend their gains on something either useless or pernicious, partly owing to the emancipation and enrichment of the juvenile munition worker, but partly owing to the respectable disguise which tobacco could assume by comparison with drink. True there still lingered the feeling that smoking was a trifle undignified

or even unrespectable, instanced as it was by that quaint, almost antediluvian, compliment often paid, half in earnest, to the non-smoker, that "he had no vices." But yet when there was a vice which slew its thousands for tobacco's tens, smoking gained a reflected respectability. Those who austerely frowned on strong liquors, were indulgent to the pipe of themselves and others. There were few (if any) homes broken up by tobacco, few or none brought to ruin by it, and if a heavy smoker affected one's nostrils unpleasantly, that was but a trifle. Many men were merely casual smokers, the majority did not smoke in business hours or at all times of the day. As for drink, the time has gone when men drank their three bottles of port at a sitting, strong drink has not now such allurements for the people at large. A more emphatic public opinion, restrictions upon sale, reduction of the number of public-houses, the greater vogue of the outdoor life, an abundant supply of other kinds of refreshment, all these things combine to diminish alcoholic excess, serious as is still the amount of money wasted on alcohol, serious as is the amount of wretchedness caused by it. Even the great War and the influence which the military machine always throws in the scale of alcoholic excess will probably not gravely affect the tendency to be moderate in drinking. A youngster who has just left the elementary school is only slightly inclined to frequent the public-house bar ; he prefers the sweet-stuff shop and its milder beverages. But a cigarette to him is an irresistible temptation. Again, with those of riper years the frequent "nip" seems to have lost something of its attraction, perhaps because the incessant cigarette supplies that repeated stimulus which victims of any habit seem to look for. There are very many who would offer a friend or a stranger a cigarette who would never dream of inviting him to drink with them. There is no moral censure attached to over-smoking such as is involved in excessive drinking ; it is a harmless failing, if it be a failing. But this view of smoking, once perhaps not absolutely unsound, is now an anachronism. Smoking is a tyranny, and a tyranny which threatens to enslave not merely men, but a goodly portion of those whose sex or years in the past were deemed to debar them from smoking. It will become necessary for those who have the national welfare at heart, and who have looked indulgently upon the habit, to re-consider their verdict, to ask themselves whether at the present time and under present conditions, tobacco smoking is not a serious waste of time, money, and energy, whether it does not gravely threaten the health of both young and old, whether we have not too lightly assumed that a man (or woman) may consume cigarettes *ad libitum* without becoming a nuisance to himself and the community, whether the social conditions under which both old and young—the latter case being of course the more serious—are incited and provoked to adopt a habit which at the best is merely useless, are not conditions which we should at once set about altering.

For the worst thing (it is perhaps also arguable that it is the best thing) about smoking is that it is an open vice. There are some who are the addicted slaves of drugs. Of these men's failings we know little, though we may suspect much. The thing is done stealthily and in secret, and the national fortunes are little affected thereby. But the votaries of nicotine perform their rites openly and proudly do their public homage. We see our friends engaged in their proceedings and are urged or importuned to follow their example, but we may not remonstrate with them, we may not bid them avoid excess. The victim goes on unblushing and unaware. He has his " dope " and his respectability

as well. He is not an awful example but an alluring instance. What everyone does—such is the logic—cannot be wrong, and, therefore, let everyone begin as soon as he—or she—can. To begin smoking is not always a pleasant process, but begun it is. The tyro soon passes from his novitiate to the stage of adept, and then proceeds, should his nerves require further assuagement, to morphia, cocaine, or the latest drug in fashion. It is the steady incessant pressure exerted by smokers on those who do not smoke through youth or any other reason, that is as serious a matter as any.

There are, of course, many pleas advanced in favour of the practice, many extenuating circumstances. We are told that smoking is a sociable thing, as we were once told that carousal was a sociable thing. But it is possible for men and women to cultivate the social sense even though they are not assisting paper cylinders stuffed with tobacco weed to burn. We are told that smoking conduces to good temper, or as a smoker temporarily a non-smoker owing to the seeing of snakes and other distressing symptoms frankly declared in my hearing, when he did not smoke he was " better in health and worse in temper." It is no doubt a disagreeable alternative, but I would personally plump for a healthy rather than a good-tempered England. But that is assuming the correctness of the statement. Seeing that so many millions smoke, so few abstain, it is doubtless true that the majority amongst nice people and good tempered people smoke, but whether their niceness or their good temper comes from the weed may be debated. This at least is certain. Keep a confirmed smoker from tobacco for even a few minutes longer than his accustomed interval, and the good temper tends to vanish. Impatience is written upon his visage, there is an air of feverish excitement about him, and when with shaking hand he at length gets to his precious stay and solace and lights his match, you will be convinced, unless you too are lighting up, that here is a " subject " whose nerves are deranged, and whose mind and body are not in perfect poise.

As bad a result of smoking as any is its subtle impairment of the moral sense, its undermining of the moral and physical energies. It is not possible to picture a man rising to the loftiest heights, being caught up into the seventh heaven and seeing sights unspeakable while under the immediate influence of tobacco. It is not possible to conceive the greatest works of the human mind, in literature, or in art, or music, as wrought and completed by a man with a pipe in his mouth. There is a certain languor about the heavy smoker. If it is a question of getting a "smoke" he is excitable and active, but he cannot otherwise concentrate his whole mind on the task in hand. He is semi-passive, he surrenders himself to an influence, he is inert, disinclined to act save to procure himself more " influence." He is indifferent to many of the decencies of life. A smoker after a long bout, surrounded by the foul and filthy remnants of his activity, the litter of charred matches, half-burnt spills, ends of cigarettes, scattered tobacco ash, is an unsightly spectacle to the eye, and an offence to the nostrils. There are few things more unpleasant either in imagination or in reality than the acrid reek of stale tobacco, few things more repellent than the exuviæ of the smoker's apparatus. Bits of matches and ends of cigarettes will go into the paper basket or the grate, awaiting the next fire, even in the month of August, and we have ourselves seen a distinguished Government official and a University Don sitting in a library (not his own) tap out his pipe ashes on his host's carpet. Thus are a man's physical perceptions dulled, his

sensibility blunted. That his moral sense is impaired needs little demonstration. Above everything he is selfish. He will go into any apartment and begin his rites without a " by-your-leave," he will, if he is a munition worker, evade the searcher and enjoy his stealthy luxury, even if sudden death for hundreds be the consequence. He will set on fire acres of moorland heather, he will puff comfortably between the sheets in bed, even though as with the Chinaman in Lamb's Essay on Roast Pig his epicurism may involve the burning down of house and home. These catastrophes do not always come to pass, because there is a special Providence which watches over the sparrow, the lunatic, the drunkard, and the smoker, and preserves the three last named from the accidents which so often threaten, and the fates which they so often woo.

It may be contended that these criticisms apply mainly if not entirely to the excessive smoker. That is so. But smoking has passed from the idle to the busy hours. In some remote circles where modern tendencies scarcely penetrate, among men of a certain age whose habits have been little touched even by the recent War, and who are too old to alter, things may not differ much, but with these insignificant exceptions the moderate smoker of old times who smoked occasionally to be social or enjoyed a few whiffs at the end of a long and busy day, is nearly as extinct as the dodo. And those who have no taste for the weed must in the last few years have found their easy-going tolerance changing into pronounced aversion. We note that our friends who once were satisfied with one or two cigarettes after dinner must now, priding themselves on their abstemiousness, have three or four, we note in both men and women the same feverish eagerness to get the " weed " between their lips at every vacant moment, we note that all rooms now are smoke-rooms—how more correct this term than the ancient " smoking room "—that every apartment has the same fragrance. At the Church portal or the Chapel door the cigarette case is opened, and the match lighted. Purveyors have no stocks despite high duties, because the errand boy and the juvenile and the woman smoker demand their quantum, and will have it. We are told on every hand—the plea which is the sternest censure—that the smoker cannot do without his weed. Two munition girls lay in a stock of 2,000 cigarettes for a fortnight's holiday and hope that it will suffice (vide *Daily Chronicle* June 9th, 1919). Regard this as an abnormal instance if you will, yet the number of cigarettes which a hardened smoker can get rid of is amazing. Minorities doubtless must suffer, and in this case they do. They cannot get away from tobacco fumes to clean air. Even if they fly to the other end of England in a non-smoking carriage the plague will follow them, for the smoker laughs at the railway regulations. And when they reach Arcadia their first sight will probably be a tobacco " divan " and a cigarette end on the roadway. No wonder Mr. Hawker, still more remarkable in that he is a non-smoker than that he is a great airman, has sought the solitudes of the mid-Atlantic.

The question whether woman should smoke seems to have been settled in the affirmative amongst all classes high or low which have not been tainted by bourgeois conventions, and woman has asserted her manhood by abandoning her womanhood. It is impossible by any system of syllogisms to demonstrate that what is right for man is wrong for woman, but deep-fixed in the male heart there remains a feeling which is not altogether a prejudice that there *is* an ideal of womanhood which rises high above the imperfections of brutal, rough, and sordid man, and that in seeking or even demanding of woman a higher

refinement and a gentler charm he is not depressing her into slavedom but rather lifting her into regions to which he alas ! can rarely rise. The thought of the Virgin receiving her Annunciation with cigarette in hand, or of the Madonna breathing the fumes of tobacco on her infant babe is hideous. And leaving those regions for the sphere of every-day life, I will add at any rate that to find the boudoir of a sixteen and a half year old girl of fashion as thick with reek after a day's smoking as a third-class smoking carriage, or to see mothers in hotel lounges puffing away with young children in their arms, is a revolting and portentous thing.

Much that has been urged above is the merest platitude. I have pointed out what has never, to my knowledge, been so far commented on, but what must be at once admitted when set forth, that the most salient characteristic of the age we live in is that it is an age which smokes, and that if history, literature, art, and antiquarianism, wish to deal with that with which human thoughts and human interests are most closely bound up, all these noble pursuits must do homage to the tobacconist, recognising that in the present age man is an animal which lives to smoke. How might a Rodin with his frightening realism embody his conception of the present age type in a figure of a man lighting a cigarette, the head thrown back, the breath drawn up the nostrils, the relaxed muscles of the trunk, the feverish expression passing at the very instant into a drowsy mask of sensual content ! Yet smoking is not one of the fundamental things like eating, drinking, and falling in love, it is not rooted in the very depths of man's existence. Whatever the sculptor or the painter may do in their quest of the abnormal, no Horace or Heine, will ever hymn in dithyrambs the praise of Nicotine, though her Ladyship would give full scope to the powers of a Swift or a Carlyle. True all ages have had their eccentricities, their oddities, but the oddness of smoking is that it is so nearly universal. Smoking is not a violation of the Decalogue—partly because the statesman of the Mosaic Code could not have conceived such folly—but if it continues on its present scale for twenty years it may do more harm than most sins. It is not as natural to smoke as to breathe ; it is not an elemental appetite, it is out of all connection with the sequence of man's progress, it is a distemper of comparatively recent development. It cannot endure in its present sovereignty, for if it should endure its slow sapping power will bring down civilisation in ruins, and a historian prone to prophecy might boldly venture to vaticinate that just as Rome sank down at last from senile decay and weakening of fibre due partly to the baleful influence of bureaucracy, so—if the smoking habit continues on its present scale—the vast Americo-European State which is arising out of the Great War will finally succumb to a more virile stock, or even perish of inanition.

But it will not, as we think. Sages of later epochs will gaze with curious eyes on cabinets wherein are enshrined meerschaums and churchwardens, Havanas venerable in the mould of ages and above all on those little bits of white rolled paper which have lost their brightness but still retain tiny fragments of that which once brought balm and solace to millions. Then will the last cigar have yielded up its fragrance, the last pipe have gone out, and the last match have been scratched, in vain, upon the match box, and the mills of the Imperial Tobacco Company, if they have not been turned to other uses, will stand gaunt ruins where the owl hoots and the heron and the bittern congregate. Tobacco like most human things, will fitly end in *smoke*. Not because the habit is irrational,

grotesque, undignified, wasteful of time, money, and energy, not even because, when carried to excess, it is ruinous to national health, but because it is in the nature of all crazes to grow, to flourish, then to wane, will tobacco smoking follow snuff-taking and many other inanities of civilisation into the limbo of the forgotten. It will have its day and cease to be, and candour compels us to admit that its succeeding folly may not prove to be so much more defensible and less ridiculous as the lover of the human kind might wish. Meanwhile we, the minority who decline to turn ourselves into inefficient flues and refuse to drowse besotted with fuliginous anodynes, must rest in patience. If the science of Medicine assists us to attain not patriarchal but merely centenarian status, we may find ourselves again in a majority.

THE GATE OF DREAMS

1919

Sunt geminæ somni portæ; quarum altera fertur
cornea, qua veris facilis datur exitus umbris.
Altera candenti perfecta nitens elephanto
sed falsa ad cœlum mittunt insomnia Manes.
His ubi tum natum Anchises unaque Sibyllam
prosequitur dictis, portaque emittit *eburna*.* Æneid VI.

After the great vision of Book VI., Virgil dismisses his hero to the world of everyday things, of struggle, hardship, and butchery. Æneas passes to it by the *ivory* gate, the gate of empty dreams. Some dreams are false, some come true. To which class belongs Literature?

To the false says the disdainful pragmatist. It is all nonsense. Literature will not light your fire in the morning, it will not cook your dinner, or mend a burst pipe, it will not increase the yield of this year's crop of turnips, or add one pound to the weight of a prime ox, it will not tar road surfaces, or increase the amount of our coal exports. *You cannot eat it.*

"War after war—not so much upon our enemies or our rivals as upon ourselves—is the only road to future peace, future prosperity, and future power." † A grand ideal! Yet when the whole energy, determination, imagination, and genius of the nation should be concentrated upon the aim of becoming the workshop of the world, we find defaulters, Neros who fiddle while Rome is burning. True, many people earn a living by literature so-called; the number of crazes is endless and charlatans will ever find their dupes. The literary man is not a producer—unless perhaps he writes "Eclipse or Empire"—he is not therefore on a level even with a motor-mechanic. He is a parasite, a drone who has to be fed and clothed, one who consciously or unconsciously humbugs his clique of admirers, a fellow whose words are as impalpable as thin air, to whose maunderings no sensible person will listen, whom no sensible person either understands or wants to understand. Even the Sheriff in Brand takes too high a view of poetry.‡

Such is the verdict of Mr. Gradgrind, the hard-headed man of business who knows

* "There are twain gates of Sleep, one, 'tis said, of horn. By that true semblances easily issue forth. The other is wrought of gleaming ivory, but the Shades send deceitful visions by it to the world above." With such words did Anchises greet his son in farewell and the Sibyl, and he sent them forth by the *ivory* gate.

† See Gray and Turner. "Eclipse or Empire."

‡ "I own I take a bit of pleasure
In poetry; our countryside
Is with me there—but all in measure:
In *life* it cannot be a guide.
It's only just an aftermath
Twixt seven and ten o'nights when neighbours
Are free and tired with all their labours
And need an elevating bath."
[*Translated by Garrett.*]

everything, whose religion is summed up in "deuce take the hindmost," and whose politics are crystallised in " Make the foreigner pay." Even when he is told of the vast profits of a Dickens, or a Wells, or a Hall Caine, or of winners of Nobel Prizes, he scarcely relents. But what is stranger, even the man of letters will ofttimes agree. He has his hour of ecstasy, when he sees things past all utterance, when he is quickened by the ardour of his imagination, and beholds rushing past him the pageant of the universe. And then comes the reaction. Virgil in the trials of the composition of the Æneid confesses that he began his masterpiece in a moment of madness,* and on his deathbed adjures his executors to burn it. There are days when the brightest of our thoughts have lost their lustre, when everything that we have accomplished seems flat, stale, and unprofitable.

" Things of a day ! what are we and what not ? A dream about a shadow is man ; yet when some god-given splendour falls, a glory of light comes over him, and his life is sweet."† But there are times when the splendour is dimmed, and life is bitter-sweet, and the glory has departed. The man of letters is not always storming the heavens, piling Pelion on Ossa. Apollo does not always strain his bow. Sometimes, obeying the universal law that action is followed by reaction, the literary man is resting preparing for future triumphs, sometimes he is dejected and over-wrought, sometimes he is merely idle. He builds himself splendid palaces, but they are in Utopia, he rears solid castles, but they are in Spain. He is a spiritual opium-eater, or like Coleridge and De Quincey he in actual fact enslaves himself to opium. He makes good resolutions like Johnson, and does not carry them out. He is *vox et præterea nihil*, for the conjunction of a Boswell and a Johnson is about as frequent as once in a thousand years. He lives sovereign of his own world, but it is a world of phantoms, he can call spirits from the vasty deep, but they are not very obedient at their coming, he is a master of words, but when he strives to fix them on paper they elude his summons, he has his principles and ruling ideas, but when he tries to seize them they are mere clouds " par levibus ventis, volucrique simillima somno." The native hue of resolution is always sicklied o'er by the pale cast of thought, and the enterprise of pith and moment is never achieved. Only the printer's devil can stir him to action, and then he writes to order, his head befogged, to help the boiling pot. He plans a great work for years, and when he is at last prepared his energy is numbed, his courage chilled, his intellect blunted. He dries up into the outer semblance of a man, he is like the little old lady in Ibsen's poem " In a Picture Gallery "‡ still painting poor Murilloes year in, year out, a pleasing but pathetic sight. He is a might-have-been.

But we need not take such an extreme case. The labour of bringing to birth any

* sed tanta inchoata res est ut *pæne vitio mentis* tantum opus ingressus mihi videar.

† Pindar VIII. Pythian.

‡ " But what is she doing ?
The same thing still-lo,
Hotly pursuing
That very Murillo !

Her wrist never falters ;
It keeps her, that poor wrist,
With panels for altars
And daubs for the tourist.

work of creative imagination is very grievous, and in prospect is chilling to the faculties. It is only those who have nothing to say who can say it easily. Carlyle contemplating his French Revolution, groaning in the spirit at the task before him, travailing in the throes of parturition, he is a piteous sight. Dreams, how beautiful they are, how soon they fade, or cease to glow! How dazzling are our visions, how pale their reality; we cannot disguise it even from ourselves! How the sick brain turns with weary satiety from the conceptions which will not body forth! And some men give up the life of letters, and others addict themselves to hack journalism and *clichés*.

Are these the lamentations of the unsuccessful? How stands the reckoning of the adept? If he has strictly meditated the thankless Muse, if he has achieved a mastery over his material, if his ideas are Djinnies which come and go obedient at his bidding, if he has a definite record of solid achievement, if he has won fame with his own generation, and the prospect of immortal honour with prosperity, how must we rank him? His laurels cannot be minted into gold, and though his name may be in all the papers, his fame will not compare with that of the music-hall comedian or the professional footballer. "Were it not better done as others use, To sport with Amaryllis in the shade, Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair?" What has he *done?* Nothing that can be stood or stamped upon like a suspension bridge, nothing that has increased the comfort of millions like the invention of the pneumatic tyre, nothing that will produce a princely fortune like a successful patent medicine, nothing that has diminished the sum of human suffering like the discovery of anæsthetics. Words are words, and things are things.

And yet there *is* the other side. If Shakespeare wrote of airy nothings and gave them a local habitation and a name, the master of New Place, Stratford, was one of the most successful men of his time. Goethe, the most illustrious man of letters of his age in all Europe, was not ashamed to manage, and to manage well, the ducal theatre of Weimar. Burke, an impossible statesman, a vehement rhetorician, composer of strident speeches which he could not deliver effectively, was able to rouse all Europe against the Spirit of Revolution. Ruskin is the accepted prophet of the new era and has passed into Heaven before all the scribes of the dismal science. Swift could have been an unrivalled agitator, and his pamphlets upon Wood's halfpence availed to create a storm in Ireland before which a Government had to bow. Sophocles was strategus at Samos without discredit, and Æschylus' greatest distinction, to his own mind, was, probably, that he was a man of Marathon. "The time is out of joint; O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right!" Yes! but Hamlet if he will—he often does not will—is best fitted to set things right. He has the insight, the intuition, the rapid seizing of a situation, the courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword.

And so she has painted
Through years unbrightened,
Till hopes have fainted
And hair has whitened.

But rapt and brimming
The eye's full chalice says
The heart builds dreaming
Its fairy-palaces." [*Translated by Garrett.*]

Every man, dream he as much as he will, has in him some time or other some impulse towards the practical. Every man some time or other, wishes to have *done* something. So there will always be a large majority—often including the dreamers themselves—who will hold that it is better to teach Greek Grammar in a schoolroom than to study Greek particles in a cloister, better to write advertisements for an emporium than to publish poems at one's own expense, better to be a Head-Master than an expert upon Psycho-Analysis, better to be an Extension Lecturer than a European authority on your subject, better to expound Socialism, even in Hyde Park or at a street corner, than to excogitate a Marxian system in a study, better to dwell in Vanity Fair than in Laputa, better to instruct Dionysius the tyrant than to seclude oneself in the groves of Academus, (even though the lion's whelp will surely turn on you) better to coin one's capital into small change than to mint it into sterling gold, better to sluice one's stream of ideas in daily conduits than to dam it up in a mighty reservoir, better to expound and to sit in judgment upon every man and everything day by day than to garner painfully all one's knowledge for a belated *magnum opus*. If only those who have achieved the wondrous feat and *have* indeed made the best of both worlds would advise us. As we peruse Lord Morley's meditations upon a strenuous and well spent life, we seem to feel more vividly the thrill that comes of being in a mighty movement, of being intimate with the great, the fascination of " surprises, sudden turns, and situations of mounting suspense, passion rising to tragic heights," and " squalid interludes, and scenes of clowns." We note the sense of fellowship that bears men on through disillusion, disappointment, dissension, disaster, to an appointed end however distant. Here is a cause to champion, comrades with whom to stand shoulder to shoulder, conclaves of mighty import such as a Milton might have described, a leader of pre-eminent personality and chieftains of prowess beside him. It is an epic tale of conflict, the tide of battle surging now this way, now that, sanguine enthusiasm and measureless dejection, Achilles or Ajax sulking in his tent, and the Trojans charging upon the ships. " Even strong minds wavered with the ebb and flow of events, but the three or four men on either side, to whom a master part had fallen, played it with steadfast and unfaltering courage." Thrilling, lofty, and inspiring it all is, but how much of its grandeur comes from the mind which our sage took to politics, and how sordid are its battles when waged by those who have neither wisdom nor worth. The oracle is two-minded, yet he will not " dishearten earnest and persistent zeal for wise politics." With Tacitean terseness he composes his epitaph. " It has been my fortune to write some pages that found and affected their share of readers ; to know and work on close terms with many men wonderfully worth knowing, to hold responsible offices in the State ; to say things in popular assemblages that made a difference." " Wisdom may be wisdom even when she chooses rhetorical apparel." Even though "most of the men I have known would rather have written the ' Decline and Fall ' than have been Mr. Pitt," even though the waste of time is " heartbreaking," " the daily comradeship of men of action blessed with good sense and public spirit engaged in common causes must be counted one of the truest pleasures of life." Lord Morley may be right, he may have done well to sacrifice literature to politics, but he has come back to literature in the " falling daylight." And truly he has shown what the man of study and the editorial chamber can do if he is swept into the vortex of present day politics.

Yet the black mood will return, the gloom of melancholy enwraps us as thickly as ever. Oh ! to do *something*, if only to send sweaters to Mesopotamia or mosquito curtains to Archangel, or walking in the paths of philanthropy, to organise a flag-day, to found a soup kitchen, distribute ten thousand pocket-handkerchiefs in the East End, or send ten thousand Woodbines to the W.A.A.C's, or, with Mrs. Jellaby, a hundred blankets to Borriboola Gha. We are such stuff as dreams are made of, and our little life is rounded by a sleep. Why wander in the land of dreams, when there are Committees to attend, Caucuses to manipulate, platforms at public meetings to sit on, and a place in " Who's Who ? " A long farewell to the realm of semblances, copies of copies. Be we bad or good we are much of a muchness. Has not Shakespeare himself pronounced our sentence by the mouth of Theseus ? " The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them."

LITERATURE *VERSUS* SCIENCE

1919

> Then said they unto him "say now Shibboleth," and he said "Sibboleth," for he could not frame to pronounce it right. JUDGES XII. 6.

On Friday, January 17th, 1919, the Senate of Cambridge University resolved by 123 votes to 60 that Greek should no longer be a compulsory subject in the Previous Examination.

I seek to pen no funeral lament upon Compulsory Greek, for I have ever hated the adjective as much as I have loved the noun. Whether those who wish to pass into Cambridge University shall spend a few months in amassing a scanty store of grammar and vocabulary, or whether they shall enter Greekless, is in itself a trifling thing, which concerns only candidates for entrance and those who prepare them. Yet the vote of Cambridge, followed so soon by that of Oxford,* deserter of lost causes for the nonce, is a portent. It signifies the defeat of the view held since the advent of the New Learning and the days of Cheke and Erasmus, that a man was to be deemed educated in no true sense if he had no tincture of the ancient humanities. Greek is removed from the list of necessary subjects for entrance, Latin may soon no longer be deemed a necessary subject for an Arts Course. It is a battle more desperate than Swift's " Battle of the Books " between the ancients and the moderns, for it is a conflict between those who love letters and books of any kind and those who are champions of " realities." It is the deadliest warfare of modern times, this contest between Literature and Science, the *combat à outrance* between matter and spirit.

True, no one yet has publicly declared for the proscription of Literature in our schemes of education. Indeed the view that education, amongst other things which it accomplishes, must fit us for a proper use of leisure, and the demand that all classes of the community should have an ampler leisure and a larger life, would be inconsistent with this rival policy. Moreover, it is possible for natural science to be studied in a humanistic spirit, and for humanistic studies to be scientific.† But it is not for humanistic reasons that those who talk of " Eclipse or Empire," seek to promote the dominance of science, and when the fairest and noblest of all literatures, the type of all that language can achieve, is assailed, however indirectly, it is a grievous thing. It is a stroke which threatens every language and every liberal study. Where Homer and Thucydides, Euripides, Pindar, and Plato have failed to win esteem, it is not likely that Molière or Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Heine and the great Victor himself will succeed with those who are intent on capturing new markets.

Literature is the greatest civilising influence which this planet has known, not railways, or steamships, or the electric light, or even the printing press. It is possible for a great civilisation to arise without all these things, it is possible for a people which knew not of pocket-handkerchiefs or watches, or gas-stoves, or Pears' soap, or the *Daily Mirror*,

* In the October Term, 1919, Oxford, came to a similar, but less drastic, decision.

† " Poetry is the impassioned expression upon the countenance of Science." Coleridge.

to speak through its wisest and greatest in such tones as still may re-echo within our hearts. " I have wrought a memorial more lasting than bronze " said Horace, rightly. His odes are likely to survive the pyramids, and have survived the triumphs of the Imperial legions. What has man done on Earth ? He has indeed wrought marvels. He discovered fire, evolved language and a sense of right and wrong, a thing more wondrous even than to fly in a Handley-Page. In battling against the blind powers of Nature he has discovered much more than how to put a roof above his head, or how to fill his belly.

" He builds the soaring spires
That sing his soul in stone; of her he draws,
Though blind to her, by spelling at her laws,
Her purest fires.

And order, high discourse,
And decency, than which is life less dear,
She has of him; the lyre of language clear,
Love's tongue and source."*

This and this much does nature owe to—

" Man her last work who seem'd so fair,
Such splendid purpose in his eyes,
Who roll'd the psalms to wintry skies,
Who built him fanes of fruitless prayer."†

Of science and the scientific spirit let no man speak with disrespect. It compasses a wider and a deeper knowledge, it seeks in its noblest votaries to gain a philosophic view of the universe. It proceeds from the particular to the general, it combines the diligence of the ant with the piercing vision of a Newton, it amasses huge stores of facts and digests them, and its method is fundamentally the same whether it deals with the affinities of the halogens, the properties of the gadolinite earths, the rings of Saturn, the Greek Optative, or the Capitularies of the Frankish Kings. Austerely disdainful of what is graceful or charming, rapt in her meditation on her vast material, scornful of everything that does not yield itself to her own methods of analysis, contemptuous of fine writing but sometimes also of the nobler ideals, Cinderella sits in her palace, slightly vengeful, resolved to instruct her naughty sisters in the error of their ways, a sceptre in her right hand and a rod of birch beside her. *Eripuitque Jovi fulmen sceptrumque tyrannis*, she has wrested from Jove his bolt, from tyrants their sceptre. She has achieved and will achieve marvels, but she sometimes mistakes conveniences for civilisation.

Men of Science claim to have dealings with realities. But so do men of letters. The true man of letters is not the idle singer of an empty day.

" Wer nie sein Brod mit Tränen ass,
Wer nicht die kummervolle Nächte
Auf seinem Bette weinend sass,
Die kennt euch nicht, ihr himmlischen Mächte"‡

---

* Meredith. " Earth and Man." † Tennyson " In Memoriam."

‡ Who never ate his bread with tears
Who never through the midnight hours
Has wept a prey to grievous fears,
He knows you not, ye heavenly powers.

It is grappling with realities, even if they be only realities of the spirit, which has brought to utterance the really great. Johnson in his garret, Carlyle wrestling with his " French Revolution " and writing it out again when it was lost, Milton dedicating himself to the service of Jehovah and the Muses, and discovering that he who would write an epic must *live* an epic, Æschylus the warrior of Marathon, Dante, he who had seen Hell and whose poem had made him thin, these men were not careless troubadours, blithe gallants penning a sonnet to a mistress's eyebrow. They toiled and strove, and combated and triumphed. Literature was not to them an ephemeral pastime, an amiable diversion, but the grimmest of realities.

What *is?* It will take more than the united efforts of the Fellows of the Royal Society to answer that. Are the things which we taste, and touch, and handle, the true realities, and is all else nought ? Is righteousness less real than a loin of pork, or sweet reasonableness than a Leyden jar, or mercifulness than a pound of potatoes ? Why does a people suddenly go mad, and why does a nation brace itself to endure the severest trials, forgetful of self, remembering only that all are brothers ? Why do men in their millions proclaim insistently that they *will* have rest and that they *will* have leisure to call their souls their own, just at the time when the sage and shrewd are planning merely to appropriate enemy territory or to annex enemy trade ? Only because it is dreadfully true that the things of this world, dynamos, aeroplanes, high finance, are nothing but for the mind and spirit of man controlling them.

The spirit of the age is indeed a potent thing and a potent phrase. We move in cycles. The votary of fashion in the fifteenth century was a Hellenist, in the twentieth, as far as service of the lips extends, a devotee of Science. Great is Progress, but of all cants the cant of progress is the worst, and of all cults modernity is that which soonest goes out of date. We are told that our civilisation depends upon science, as though civilisation were a matter of transports, and comforts, and conveniences, and not of spiritual things. The Englishman of a century ago dispensed with many, the Greek of the age of Pericles dispensed with most, of the things which we regard as indispensable. They were not, probably, much less happy. It is doubtful whether all the inventions of the eminent Applied Scientists of the nineteenth century have added as much to the sum of human happiness as a single novel of Dickens, or even a single opera of Gilbert and Sullivan, particularly if we first subtract from all the benefits which Applied Science has bestowed the agonies and distress and ruin which have been wrought by Zeppelins and high explosives, flame-throwers, and all the other deathly instruments in war's savage arsenal. Culture and Kultur differ by more than two letters.

What then will the lovers of literature do in the new epoch ? First they will continue to love literature. We, to whom literature has been a delight and a consolation and a refuge since our earliest days, cannot waver in our allegiance, and will not be false to our troth. We will give no lip service to more fashionable studies. When truculent adversaries command " Say now shibboleth," we will say sibboleth, we *cannot* frame to pronounce it right. We will treat natural science with all due honour, but our hearts are with our ancient loyalties. We shall need all our patience too. " Presbyter is but priest writ large." There is no evidence that men of science, if they win a position of predominance, will exercise a sway much milder than the tyrannies which have preceded

them, nor is there ground for hope that the loftier aspects of science will make their appeal to the British public rather than the possibilities of getting rich quick which applied science affords. And we must strive to keep our sense of proportion. We will submit ourselves to chloroform when we undergo an operation, we will profit by all the developments of electricity, we will mount our bicycles, ride in motors, or even aeroplanes, we will accept everything that chemistry, biology, and all the other 'ologies can give us, but we will not mistake the means or modes of life for life itself. After we have passed our toilsome day in speaking over telephones, girdling the earth by wireless telegraphy in twenty minutes, managing a railway company, or organising a modern university—and it is strange to how many different posts the votaries of the despised classics are called—we will for one quiet hour forget the chains and comforts of " civilisation " as we turn the pages of our Shakespeare, Milton, Virgil, and Euripides.

" There is no power I can find, though I sink my plummet through all being, except only Zeus, if I would in very truth cast off this aimless burden of my heart. Lo ! there was one great of yore, swollen with strength and lust of battle, yet it shall not even be said of him that once he was. And he who came thereafter met his conqueror, and is gone. Call thou on Zeus by name of Victory . . . . . Zeus who made for Man the road to Thought, who stablished " Learn by Suffering " to be an abiding Law."* That writer had never seen a Dreadnought or a Zeppelin, yet he could utter thoughts which go deeper than all the confused wrestlings of Mr. H. G. Wells, the prophet *par excellence* of Science. Science we are told, is the new Gospel which will make all eager in the pursuit of knowledge, render Nature slave to Man, abolish all error, blot out all unhappiness. No ! Horatio. There are more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamed of in *thy* philosophy.

* The Agamemnon of Æschylus. (The lines are translated by Professor Murray in his " Greek Literature.")

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